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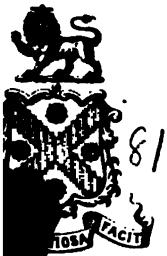

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SERMONS,

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

REV. WILLIAM PALEY, D. D.

SUBDEAN OF LINCOLN,

PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S,

AND RECTOR OF BISHOP-WEARMOUTH.

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THE Author of these Sermons, by a codicil to his Will, declared as follows; "If my life had been continued, it was my intention to have printed at Sunderland a Volume of Sermons — about 500 copies; to be distributed gratis in the parish; and I had proceeded so far in the design as to have transcribed several Sermons for that purpose, which are in a parcel by themselves. There is also a parcel from which I intended to make other transcripts; but the business is in an imperfect, unfinished state; the arrangement is not settled further than that I thought the Sermon on Seriousness in Religion should come first, and then the doctrinal Sermons; there are also many repetitions in them, and some that might be omitted or consolidated with others." The codicil then goes on to direct, that, after such disposition should have been made respecting the Manuscripts as might be deemed necessary, they should be printed by the Rev. Mr. Stephenson, at the expence of the testator's executors, and distributed in the neighbourhood, first to those who frequented church, then to farmers' families in the country, then to such as had a person in the family who

could read, and were likely to read them: and finally, it is added, "I would not have the said Sermons published for sale."

In compliance with this direction, the following Sermons were selected, printed, and distributed by the Rev. Mr. Stephenson, in and about the parish of Bishop-Wearmouth, in the year 1806.

These Discourses were not originally composed for publication, but were written for, and as appears by the Manuscripts, had most of them been preached at the Parish Churches of which, in different parts of the Author's life, he had the care. It was undoubtedly the Author's intention that they should not be published; but the circulation of such a number as he had directed by his will to be distributed, rendered it impossible to adhere to that intention; and it was found necessary to publish them, as the only means of preventing a surreptitious sale.

The produce of the sale of the copy-right (except two sums of 50l. given towards the establishment of charitable schools at Bishop-Wearmouth and Settle, in Yorkshire), has been paid over by the Author's Executors to the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy, to be added to the general funds of that Institution.

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SERMON I.

SERIOUSNESS IN RELIGION INDISPENSABLE ABOVE ALL OTHER DISPOSITIONS.

1 PETER, iv. 7.

—— *Be ye, therefore, sober, and watch unto prayer.*

THE first requisite in religion is seriousness. No impression can be made without it. An orderly life, so far as others are able to observe us, is now and then produced by prudential motives, or by dint of habit; but without seriousness there can be no religious principle at the bottom, no course of conduct, flowing from religious motives; in a word, there can be no religion. This cannot exist without seriousness upon the subject. Perhaps a teacher of religion has more difficulty in producing

seriousness amongst his hearers, than in any other part of his office. Until he succeed in this, he loses his labour; and when once, from any cause whatever, a spirit of levity has taken hold of a mind, it is next to impossible to plant serious considerations in that mind. It is seldom to be done except by some great shock or alarm, sufficient to make a radical change in the disposition; and which is God's own way of bringing about the business.

One might have expected that events so awful and tremendous, as death and judgment; that a question so deeply interesting, as whether we shall go to heaven or to hell; could in no possible case, and in no constitution of mind whatever, fail of exciting the most serious apprehension and concern. But this is not so. In a thoughtless, a careless, a sensual world, many are always found who can resist, and who do resist, the force and importance of all these reflections; that is to say, they suffer nothing of the kind to enter into their thoughts. There are grown men and women, nay, even middle-aged persons, who

have not thought seriously about religion an hour, nor a quarter of an hour, in the whole course of their lives. This great object of human solicitude affects not them in any manner whatever.

It cannot be without its use to enquire into the causes of a levity of temper, which so effectually obstructs the admission of every religious influence, and which I should almost call unnatural.

Now there is a numerous class of mankind, who are wrought upon by nothing but what applies immediately to their senses; by what they see, or by what they feel; by pleasures or pains, or by the near prospect of pleasures and pains which they actually experience or actually observe. But it is the characteristic of religion to hold out to our consideration consequences which we do not perceive at the time. That is its very office and province. Therefore, if men will restrict and confine all their regards and all their cares to things which they perceive with their outward senses; if they will yield up their

understandings to their senses, both in what these senses are fitted to apprehend, and in what they are not fitted to apprehend, it is utterly impossible for religion to settle in their hearts, or for them to entertain any serious concern about the matter. But surely this conduct is completely irrational, and can lead to nothing but ruin. It proceeds upon the supposition, that there is nothing above us, about us, or future, by which we can be affected, but the things which we see with our eyes or feel by our touch. All which is untrue. "The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are seen; even his eternal Power and Godhead;" which means, that the order, contrivance, and design, displayed in the creation, prove with certainty, that there is more in nature than what we really see; and that amongst the invisible things of the universe, there is a Being, the author and origin of all this contrivance and design, and, by consequence, a Being of stupendous power, and of wisdom and knowledge incomparably exalted above any wisdom or knowledge

which we see in man; and that he stands in the same relation to us as the maker does to the thing made. The things which are seen are not made of the things which do appear. This is plain: and this argument is independent of Scripture and revelation. What further moral or religious consequences properly follow from it, is another question; but the proposition itself shows, that they who cannot, and they who will not, raise their minds above the mere information of their senses, are in a state of gross error as to the real truth of things, and are also in a state to which the faculties of man ought not to be degraded. A person of this sort may, with respect to religion, remain a child all his life. A child naturally has no concern but about the things which directly meet its senses; and the person we describe is in the same condition.

Again; there is a race of giddy thoughtless men and women, of young men and young women more especially, who look no further than the next day, the next week, the next month; seldom or ever so

far as the next year. Present pleasure is every thing with them. The sports of the day, the amusements of the evening, entertainments, and diversions, occupy all their concern; and so long as these can be supplied in succession, so long as they can go from one diversion to another, their minds remain in a state of perfect indifference to every thing except their pleasures. Now what chance has religion with such dispositions as these? Yet these dispositions begun in early life, and favoured by circumstances, that is, by affluence and health, cleave to a man's character much beyond the period of life in which they might seem to be excusable. Excusable did I say? I ought rather to have said, that they are contrary to reason and duty, in every condition and at every period of life. Even in youth they are built upon falsehood and folly. Young persons, as well as old, find that things do actually come to pass. Evils and mischiefs, which they regarded as distant, as out of their view, as beyond the line and reach of their preparations or their concern, come, they find, to be actually felt. They find that nothing is done

by slighting them beforehand; for however neglected or despised, perhaps ridiculed and derided, they come not only to be things present, but the very things, and the only things about which their anxiety is employed, become serious things indeed, as being the things which now make them wretched and miserable. Therefore a man must learn to be affected by events which appear to lie at some distance, before he will be seriously affected by religion.

Again; the general course of education is much against religious seriousness, even without those who conduct education, foreseeing or intending any such effect. Many of us are brought up with this world set before us and nothing else. Whatever promotes this world's prosperity is praised; whatever hurts and obstructs and prejudices this world's prosperity is blamed: and there all praise and censure end. We see mankind about us in motion and action, but all these motions and actions directed to worldly objects. We hear their conversation, but it is all the same way.

And this is what we see and hear from the first. The views which are continually placed before our eyes regard this life alone and its interests. Can it then be wondered at that an early worldly-mindedness is bred in our hearts so strong as to shut out heavenly-mindedness entirely? In the contest which is always carrying on between this world and the next, it is no difficult thing to see what advantage this world has. One of the greatest of these advantages is, that it pre-occupies the mind: it gets the first hold and the first possession. Childhood and youth, left to themselves, are necessarily guided by sense: and sense is all on the side of this world. Meditation brings us to look towards a future life; but then meditation comes afterwards; it only comes when the mind is already filled and engaged and occupied, nay often crowded and surcharged with worldly ideas. It is not only, therefore, fair and right, but it is absolutely necessary to give to religion all the advantage we can give it by dint of education; for all that can be done is too little to set religion upon an equality with its rival: which

rival is the world. A creature which is to pass a small portion of its existence in one state, and that state to be preparatory to another, ought, no doubt, to have its attention constantly fixed upon its ulterior and permanent destination. And this would be so, if the question between them come fairly before the mind. We should listen to the Scriptures, we should embrace religion, we should enter into every thing which had relation to the subject, with a concern and impression, even far more than the pursuits of this world, eager and ardent as they are, excite. But the question between religion and the world does not come fairly before us. What surrounds us is this world; what addresses our senses and our passions is this world; what is at hand, what is in contact with us, what acts upon us, what we act upon, is this world. Reason, faith, and hope, are the only principles to which religion applies, or possibly can apply: and it is reason, faith, and hope, striving with sense, striving with temptation, striving for things absent against things which are present. That religion, therefore, may not be quite excluded and

overborne, may not quite sink under these powerful causes, every support ought to be given to it, which can be given by education, by instruction, and, above all, by the example of those, to whom young persons look up, acting with a view to a future life themselves.

Again; it is the nature of worldly business of all kinds, especially of much hurry or over-employment, or over-anxiety in business, to shut out and keep out religion from the mind. The question is, whether the state of mind which this cause produces, ought to be called a want of seriousness in religion. It becomes coldness and indifference towards religion; but is it properly a want of seriousness upon the subject? I think it is; and in this way. We are never serious upon any matter which we regard as trifling. This is impossible. And we are led to regard a thing as trifling, which engages no portion of our habitual thoughts, in comparison with what other things do.

But further; the world, even in its in-

nocent pursuits and pleasures, has a tendency unfavourable to the religious sentiment. But were these all it had to contend with, the strong application which religion makes to the thoughts whenever we think of it at all, the strong interest which it presents to us, might enable it to overcome and prevail in the contest. But there is another adversary to oppose much more formidable; and that is sensuality; an addiction to sensual pleasures. It is the flesh which lusteth against the spirit; that is the war which is waged within us. So it is, no matter what may be the cause, that sensual indulgences, over and above their proper criminality, as sins, as offences against God's commands, have a specific effect upon the heart of man in destroying the religious principle within him; or still more surely in preventing the formation of that principle. It either induces an open profaneness of conversation and behaviour, which scorns and contemns religion; a kind of profligacy, which rejects and sets at nought the whole thing; or it brings upon the heart an averseness to the subject, a fixed dislike and reluctance to

enter upon its concerns in any way whatever. That a resolved sinner should set himself against a religion which tolerates no sin, is not to be wondered at. He is against religion, because religion is against the course of life upon which he has entered, and which he does not feel himself willing to give up. But this is not the whole, nor is it the bottom of the matter. The effect we allude to is not so reasoning or argumentative as this. It is a specific effect upon the mind. The heart is rendered unsusceptible of religious impressions, incapable of a serious regard to religion. And this effect belongs to sins of sensuality more than to other sins. It is a consequence which almost universally follows from them.

. . . . . .

We measure the importance of things, not by what, or according to what they are in truth, but by and according to the space and room which they occupy in our minds. Now our business, our trade, our schemes, our pursuits, our gains, our losses, our fortunes, possessing so much of our minds, whether we regard the hours

we expend in meditating upon them, or the earnestness with which we think about them; and religion possessing so little share of our thought either in time or earnestness; the consequence is, that worldly interest comes to be the serious thing with us, religion comparatively the trifle. Men of business are naturally serious; but all their seriousness is absorbed by their business. In religion they are no more serious than the most giddy characters are; than those characters are which betray a levity in all things.

Again; the want of due seriousness in religion is almost sure to be the consequence of the absence or disuse of religious ordinances and exercises. I use two terms, *absence* and *disuse*. Some have never attended upon any religious ordinance, or practised any religious exercises, since the time they were born; some a very few times in their lives. With these it is the *absence* of religious ordinances and exercises. There are others (and many we fear of this description), who, whilst under the guidance of their parents, have frequented

religious ordinances, and been trained up to religious exercises, but who, when they came into more public life, and to be their own masters, and to mix in the pleasures of the world, or engage themselves in its business and pursuits, have forsaken these duties in whole or in a great degree. With these it is the *disuse* of religious ordinances and exercises. But I must also explain what I mean by *religious ordinances* and *exercises*. By *religious ordinances* I mean the being instructed in our catechism in our youth; attending upon public worship at church; the keeping holy the Lord's day regularly, and most particularly, together with a few other days in the year, by which some very principal events and passages of the Christian history are commemorated; and, at its proper season, the more solemn office of receiving the Lord's supper. These are so many rites and ordinances of Christianity; concerning all which it may be said, that with the greatest part of mankind, especially of that class of mankind which must, or does, give much of its time and care to worldly concerns, they are little less than absolutely necessary; if we

judge it to be necessary to maintain and uphold any sentiment, any impression, any seriousness about religion in the mind at all. They are necessary to preserve in the thoughts a *place* for the subject; they are necessary that the train of our thoughts may not even be closed up against it. Were all days of the week alike, and employed alike; was there no difference or distinction between Sunday and work-day; was there not a church in the nation; were we never from one year's end to another called together to participate in public worship; were there no set forms of public worship; no particular persons appointed to minister and officiate, indeed no assemblies for public worship at all; no joint prayers; no preaching; still religion, in itself, in its reality and importance, in its end and event, would be the same thing as what it is: we should still have to account for our conduct; there would still be heaven and hell; salvation and perdition; there would still be the laws of God, both natural and revealed; all the obligation which the authority of a Creator can impose upon a creature; all the gratitude

which is due from a rational being to the Author and Giver of every blessing which he enjoys; lastly, there would still be the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. All these things would, with or without religious ordinances, be equally real, and existing, and valid, but men would not think equally about them. Many would entirely, and totally neglect them. Some there would always be of a more devout, or serious, or contemplative disposition, who would retain a lively sense of these things under all circumstances, and all disadvantages, who would never lose their veneration for them, never forget them. But from others, from the careless, the busy, the followers of pleasure, the pursuers of wealth or advancement, these things would slip away from the thoughts entirely.

Together with *religious ordinances* we mentioned *religious exercises.* By the term *religious exercises,* I in particular mean private prayer; whether it be at set times, as in the morning and evening of each day; or whether it be called forth by occasions, as when we are to form some

momentous decision, or enter upon some great undertaking: or when we are under some pressing difficulty or deep distress, some excruciating bodily pain, or heavy affliction; or, on the other hand, and no less properly, when we have lately been receiving some signal benefit, experiencing some signal mercy; such as preservation from danger, relief from difficulty or distress, abatement of pain, recovery from sickness: for by prayer, let it be observed, we mean devotion in general; and thanksgiving is devotion as much as prayer itself. I mean private prayer, as here described; and I also mean, what is perhaps the most natural form of private prayer, short ejaculatory extemporaneous addresses to God, as often as either the reflections which rise up in our minds, let them come from what quarter they may, or the objects and incidents which seize our attention, prompt us to utter them; which, in a religiously disposed mind, will be the case, I may say, every hour, and which ejaculation may be offered up to God in any posture, in any place, or in any situation. Amongst religious exercises I also reckon

family prayer, which unites many of the uses both of public worship and private prayer. The reading of religious books is likewise to be accounted a religious exercise. Religious meditations still more so; and more so for this reason, that it implies and includes that most important duty, self-examination: for I hold it to be next to impossible for a man to meditate upon religion, without meditating at the same time upon his own present condition with respect to the tremendous alternative which is to take place upon him after his death.

These are what we understand by religious exercises; and they are all so far of the same nature with religious ordinances, that they are aids and helps of religion itself; and I think that religious seriousness cannot be maintained in the soul without them.

But again; a cause which has a strong tendency to destroy religious seriousness, and which almost infallibly prevents its formation and growth in young minds, is

levity in conversation upon religious subjects, or upon subjects connected with religion. Whether we regard the practice with respect to those who use it, or to those who hear it, it is highly to be blamed, and is productive of great mischief. In those who use it, it amounts almost to a proof that they are destitute of religious seriousness. The principle itself is destroyed in them, or was never formed in them. Upon those who hear, its effect is this. If they have concern about religion, and the disposition towards religion which they ought to have, and which we signify by this word *seriousness*, they will be inwardly shocked and offended by the levity with which they hear it treated. They will, as it were, resent such treatment of a subject, which by them has always been thought upon with awe, and dread, and veneration. But the pain with which they were at first affected goes off by hearing frequently the same sort of language; and then they will be almost sure, if they examine the state of their minds as to religion, to feel a change in themselves for the worse. This is the danger to which those are exposed, who

had before imbibed serious impressions. Those who had not, will be prevented, by such sort of conversation, from ever imbibing them at all; so that its influence is in all cases pernicious.

The turn which this levity usually takes, is in jests and raillery upon the opinions, or the peculiarities, or the persons of men of particular sects, or who bear particular names; especially if they happen to be more serious than ourselves. And of late this loose, and I can hardly help calling it profane humour, has been directed chiefly against the followers of methodism. But against whomsoever it happens to be pointed, it has all the bad effects both upon the speaker and the hearer which we have noticed: and as in other instances, so in this, give me leave to say, that it is very much misplaced. In the first place, were the doctrines and sentiments of those who bear this name ever so foolish and extravagant (I do not say that they are either) this proposition I shall always maintain to be true, viz. that the wildest opinion that ever was entertained in matters of religion, is more

rational than unconcern about these matters. Upon this subject nothing is so absurd as indifference; no folly so contemptible as thoughtlessness and levity. In the next place, do methodists deserve this treatment? Be their particular doctrines what they may, the professors of these doctrines appear to be in earnest about them: and a man who is in earnest in religion cannot be a bad man, still less a fit subject for derision. I am no methodist myself. In their leading doctrines I differ from them. But I contend, that sincere men are not, for these, or indeed any doctrines, to be made laughing stocks to others. I do not bring in the case of methodists in this part of my discourse, for the purpose of vindicating their tenets, but for the purpose of observing, (and I wish that the observation may weigh with all my readers,) that the custom of treating their characters and persons, their preaching or their preachers, their meetings or worship, with scorn, has the pernicious consequence of destroying our own seriousness, together with the seriousness of those who hear or join in such sort of con-

versation; especially if they be young persons: and I am persuaded that much mischief is actually done in this very way.

A phrase much used upon these occasions, and frequent in the mouths of those who speak of such as in religious matters are more serious than themselves, is, "that they are righteous over-much." These, it is true, are Scripture words; and it is that circumstance which has given currency to the expression: but in the way and sense in which they are used, I am convinced that they are exceedingly misapplied. The text occurs once in the Bible, and only once. It is in the book of Ecclesiastes, 7th chap. and 16th verse. It is not very easy to determine what is meant by it in the place in which it is found. It is a very obscure passage. It seems to me most probable, that it relates to an external affectation of righteousness, not prompted by internal principle; or rather to the assuming the character of righteousness, merely to vaunt or show our superiority over others: to conceitedness in religion: in like manner as the caution de-

livered in the same verse, "be not over-wise," respects the ostentation of wisdom, and not the attainment itself. So long as we mean by righteousness, a sincere and anxious desire to seek out the will of God, and to perform it, it is impossible to be righteous over-much. There is no such thing in nature: nor was it, nor could it be, the intention of any passage in the Bible, to say that there is, or to authorise us in casting over-righteousness as a reproach or a censure upon any one.

In like manner it has been objected, that so much regard, or, as the objectors would call it, over-regard for religion, is inconsistent with the interest and welfare of our families, and with success and prosperity in our worldly affairs. I believe that there is very little ground for this objection in fact, and even as the world goes: in reason and principle there is none. A good Christian divides his time between the duties of religion, the calls of business, and those quiet relaxations which may be innocently allowed to his circumstances and condition, and which will be chiefly in his

family or amongst a few friends. In this plan of life there is no confusion or interference of its parts; and unless a man be given to sloth and laziness, which are what religion condemns, he will find time enough for them all. This calm system may not be sufficient for that unceasing eagerness, hurry, and anxiety about worldly affairs, in which some men pass their lives; but it is sufficient for every thing which reasonable prudence requires: and it is perfectly consistent with usefulness in our stations, which is a main point. Indeed, compare the hours which serious persons spend in religious exercises and meditations, with the hours which the thoughtless and irreligious spend in idleness and vice and expensive diversions, and you will perceive on which side of the comparison the advantage lies, even in this view of the subject.

Nor is there any thing in the nature of religion to support the objection. In a certain sense, it is true, what has been sometimes said, that religion ought to be the rule of life, not the business; by which

is meant, that the subject matter even of religious duties lies in the common affairs and transactions of the world. Diligence in our calling is an example of this; which, however, keeps both a man's head and hands at work upon business merely temporal; yet religion may be governing him here meanwhile. God may be feared in the busiest scenes.

In addition to the above, there exists another prejudice against religious seriousness, arising from a notion very commonly entertained, viz. that religion leads to gloom and melancholy. This notion, I am convinced, is a mistake. Some persons are constitutionally subject to melancholy, which is as much a disease in them, as the ague is a disease; and it may happen that such men's melancholy shall fall upon religious ideas, as it may upon any other subject which seizes their distempered imagination. But this is not religion leading to melancholy. Or it sometimes is the case, that men are brought to a sense of religion by calamity and affliction, which produce at the same time depression of spirits. But

neither here is religion the cause of this distress or dejection, or to be blamed for it. These cases being excepted, the very reverse of what is alleged against religion is the truth. No man's spirits were ever hurt by doing his duty. On the contrary, one good action, one temptation resisted and overcome, one sacrifice of desire or interest purely for conscience sake, will prove a cordial for weak and low spirits beyond what either indulgence or diversion or company can do for them. And a succession and course of such action and self-denials, springing from a religious principle and manfully maintained, is the best possible course that can be followed as a remedy for sinkings and oppressions of this kind. Can it then be true, that religion leads to melancholy? Occasions arise to every man living; to many very severe as well as repeated occasions, in which the hopes of religion are the only stay that is left him. Godly men have that within them, which cheers and comforts them in their saddest hours: ungodly men have that which strikes their heart, like a dagger, in its gayest moments. Godly men dis-

cover, what is very true, but what by most men is found out too late, namely, that a good conscience, and the hope of our Creator's final favour and acceptance, are the only solid happiness to be attained in this world. Experience corresponds with the reason of the thing. I take upon me to say, that religious men are generally cheerful. If this be not observed, as might be expected, supposing it to be true, it is because the cheerfulness which religion inspires does not show itself in noise or in fits and starts of merriment, but is calm and constant. Of this the only true and valuable kind of cheerfulness, for all other kinds are hollow and unsatisfying, religious men possess not less but a greater share than others.

Another destroyer of religious seriousness, and which is the last I shall mention, is a certain fatal turn which some minds take, namely, that when they find difficulties in or concerning religion, or any of the tenets of religion, they forthwith plunge into irreligion; and make these difficulties, or any degree of uncertainty which seems

to their apprehension to hang over the subject, a ground and occasion for giving full liberty to their inclinations, and for casting off the restraints of religion entirely. This is the case with men, who, at the best, perhaps, were only balancing between the sanctions of religion and the love of pleasure or of unjust gain, but especially the former. In this precarious state, any objection, or appearance of objection, which diminishes the force of the religious impression, determines the balance against the side of virtue, and gives up the doubter to sensuality, to the world, and to the flesh. Now, of all ways which a man can take, this is the surest way to destruction; and it is completely irrational. I say it is completely irrational; for when we meditate upon the tremendous consequences which form the subject of religion, we cannot avoid this reflection, that any degree of probability whatever, I had almost said any degree of possibility whatever, of religion being true, ought to determine a rational creature so to act as to secure himself from punishment in a future state, and the loss of that happiness which may be

attained. Therefore he has no pretence for alleging uncertainty as an excuse for his conduct, because he does not act in conformity with that in which there is no uncertainty at all. In the next place, it is giving to apparent difficulties more weight than they are entitled to. I only request any man to consider, first, the necessary allowances to be made for the short-sightedness and the weakness of the human understanding; secondly, the nature of those subjects concerning which religion treats, so remote from our senses, so different from our experience, so above and beyond the ordinary train and course of our ideas! and then say, whether difficulties, and great difficulties also, were not to be expected; nay further, whether they be not in some measure subservient to the very purpose of religion. The reward of everlasting life, and the punishment of misery of which we know no end, if they were present and immediate, could not be withstood, and would not leave any room for liberty or choice. But this sort of force upon the will is not what God designed; nor is suitable indeed to the nature of free,

moral, and accountable agents. The truth is, and it was most likely beforehand that it would be so, that amidst some points which are dark, some which are dubious, there are many which are clear and certain. Now, I apprehend, that, if we act faithfully up to those points concerning which there is no question, most especially if we determine upon and choose our rule and course of life according to those principles of choice which all men whatever allow to be wise and safe principles, and the only principles which are so; and conduct ourselves stedfastly according to the rule thus chosen, the difficulties which remain in religion will not move or disturb us much; and will, as we proceed, become gradually less and fewer. Whereas, if we begin with objections; if all we consider about religion be its difficulties; but most especially, if we permit the suggestion of difficulties to drive us into a practical rejection of religion itself, and to afford us, which is what we wanted, an excuse to ourselves for casting off its restraints; then the event will be, that its difficulties will multiply upon us; its light grow more and

more dim, and we shall settle in the worst and most hopeless of all conditions; the last condition, I will venture to say, in which any man living would wish his son, or any one whom he loved, and for whose happiness he was anxious, to be placed; a life of confirmed vice and dissoluteness; founded in a formal renunciation of religion.

He that has to preach Christianity to persons in this state, has to preach to stones. He must not expect to be heard, either with complacency or seriousness, or patience, or even to escape contempt and derision. Habits of thinking are fixed by habits of acting; and both too solidly fixed to be moved by human persuasion. God in his mercy, and by his providences, as well as by his spirit, can touch and soften the heart of stone. And it is seldom perhaps, that, without some strong, and it may be, sudden impressions of this kind, and from this source, serious sentiments ever penetrate dispositiónes hardened in the manner which we have here described.

SERMON II.

TASTE FOR DEVOTION.

JOHN, iv. 23, 24.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.

A TASTE and relish for religious exercise, or the want of it, is one of the marks and tokens by which we may judge whether our heart be right towards God or not. God is unquestionably an object of devotion to every creature which he has made capable of devotion; consequently, our minds can never be right towards him, unless they be in a devotional frame. It

cannot be disputed, but that the Author and Giver of all things, upon whose will and whose mercy we depend for every thing we have, and for every thing we look for, ought to live in the thoughts and affections of his rational creatures. "Through thee have I been holden up ever since I was born; thou art he that took me from my mother's womb; my praise shall be always of thee." If there be such things as first sentiments towards God, these words of the Psalmist express them. That devotion to God is a duty, stands upon the same proof as that God exists. But devotion is an act of the mind strictly. In a certain sense, duty to a fellow-creature may be discharged if the outward act be performed, because the benefit to him depends upon the act. Not so with devotion. It is altogether the operation of the mind. God is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit, that is, in mind and thought. The devotion of the mind may be, will be, ought to be, testified and accompanied by outward performances and expressions: but, without the mind going along with it, no form, no solemnity can

avail, as a service to God. It is not so much a question under what mode men worship their Maker; but this is the question, whether their mind, and thoughts, and affections accompany the mode which they adopt or not. I do not say, that modes of worship are indifferent things; for certainly one mode may be more rational, more edifying, more pure than another; but they are indifferent, in comparison with the question, whether the heart attend the worship, or be estranged from it.

These two points, then, being true; first, that devotion is a duty; secondly, that the heart must participate to make any thing we do devotion; it follows, that the heart cannot be right toward God, unless it be possessed with a taste and relish for his service, and for what relates to it.

Men may, and many undoubtedly do, attend upon acts of religious worship, and even from religious motives, yet, at the same time, without this taste and relish of which we are speaking. Religion has no

savour for them. I do not allude to the case of those who attend upon the public worship of the church, or of their communion, from compliance with custom, out of regard to station, for example's sake merely, from habit merely; still less to the case of those who have particular worldly views in so doing. I lay the case of such persons, for the present, out of the question; and I consider only the case of those, who, knowing and believing the worship of God to be a duty, and that the wilful neglect of this, as of other duties, must look forward to future punishment, do join in worship from a principle of obedience, from a consideration of those consequences which will follow disobedience; from the fear indeed of God, and the dread of his judgments (and so far from motives of religion), yet without any taste or relish for religious exercise itself. That is the case I am considering. It is not for us to presume to speak harshly of any conduct, which proceeds, in any manner, from a regard to God, and the expectation of a future judgment. God, in his Scriptures, holds out to man terrors, as well as promises; pu-

nishment after death, as well as reward. Undoubtedly he intended those motives which he himself proposes, to operate and have their influence. Wherever they operate, good ensues; very great and important good, compared with the cases in which they do not operate; yet not all the good we would desire, not all which is attainable, not all which we ought to aim at, in our Christian course. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but calling it the beginning, implies that we ought to proceed further; namely, from his fear to his love.

To apply this distinction to the subject before us; the man who serves God from a dread of his displeasure, and therefore in a certain sense by constraint, is, beyond all comparison, in a better situation, as touching his salvation, than he who defies this dread, and breaks through this constraint. He, in a word, who obeys, from whatever motive his obedience springs, provided it be a religious motive, is of a character, as well as in a condition, infinitely preferable to the character and con-

dition of the man whom no motives whatever can induce to perform his duty. Still it is true, that if he feels not within himself a taste and relish of the service which he performs, (to say nothing of the consideration how much less acceptable his service may be,) and for devotion itself, he wants one satisfactory evidence of his heart being right towards God. A further progress in religion will give him this evidence, but it is not yet attained: as yet, therefore, there is a great deficiency.

The taste and relish for devotion, of which we are speaking, is what good men in all ages have felt strongly. It appears in their history: it appears in their writings. The book of Psalms in particular, was, great part of it, composed under the impression of this principle. Many of the Psalms are written in the truest spirit of devotion; and it is one test of the religious frame of our own minds, to observe whether we have a relish for these compositions; whether our hearts are stirred as we read them; whether we perceive in them words alone, a mere letter, or so many

grateful gratifying sentiments towards God, in unison with what we ourselves feel, or have before felt. And what we are saying of the book of Psalms, is true of many religious books that are put into our hands, especially books of devotional religion: which, though they be human compositions, and nothing more, are of a similar cast with the devotional writings of Scripture, and excellently calculated for their purpose.* We read of aged persons, who passed the greatest part of their time in acts of devotion, and passed it with enjoyment. "Anna, the prophetess, was of great age, which departed not from the temple, but served God, with fastings and prayers, night and day." The first Christians, so far as can be gathered from their history in the Acts of the Apostles, and the

* Amongst these I particularly recommend the prayers and devotions annexed to the new Whole Duty of Man. Bishop Burnet, in speaking of such kind of books, very truly says, "By the frequent reading of these books, by the relish that one has in them, by the delight they give, and the effects they produce, a man will plainly perceive whether his soul is made for divine matters, or not; what suitableness there is between him and them; and whether he is yet touched with such a sense of religion, as to be capable of dedicating himself to it."

Epistles, as well as from the subsequent accounts that are left of them, took great delight in exercises of devotion. These seemed to form, indeed, the principal satisfaction of their lives in this world. "Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread," that is, celebrating the holy communion, "from house to house, they eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God." In this spirit Christians set out, finding the greatest gratification they were capable of, in acts and exercises of devotion. A great deal of what is said in the New Testament, by Saint Paul in particular, about "rejoicing in the Lord, rejoicing in the Holy Ghost, rejoicing in hope, rejoicing in consolation, rejoicing in themselves, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," refer to the pleasure, and the high and spiritual comfort which they found in religious exercises. Much, I fear, of this spirit is fled. There is a coldness in our devotions, which argues a decay of religion amongst us. Is it true that men, in these days, perform religious exercises as frequently as they ought, or as those did who have gone be-

fore us in the Christian course? that is one question to be asked: but there is also another question of still greater importance, viz. do they find in these performances that gratification which the first and best disciples of the religion actually found? which they ought to find; and which they would find, did they possess the taste and relish concerning which we are discoursing, and which, if they do not possess, they want one great proof of their heart being right towards God.

If the spirit of prayer, as it is sometimes called, if the taste and relish for devotion, if a devotional frame of mind be within us, it will show itself in the turn and cast of our meditations, in the warmth, and earnestness, and frequency of our secret applications to God in prayer; in the deep, unfeigned, heart-piercing, heart-sinking sorrow of our confessions and our penitence; in the sincerity of our gratitude and of our praise; in our admiration of the divine bounty to his creatures; in our sense of particular mercies to ourselves. We shall pray much in secret. We shall address

ourselves to God of our own accord, in our walks, our closet, our bed. Form, in these addresses, will be nothing. Every thing will come from the heart. We shall feed the flame of devotion by continually returning to the subject. No man who is endued with the taste and relish we speak of, will have God long out of his mind. Under one view or other, God cannot be long out of a devout mind. "Neither was God in all his thoughts," is a true description of a complete dereliction of religious principle: but it can by no possibility, be the case with a man who has the spirit of devotion, or any portion of that spirit within him.

But it is not in our private religion alone, that the effect and benefit of this principle is perceived. The true taste and relish we so much dwell upon, will bring a man to the public worship of God; and, what is more, will bring him in such a frame of mind, as to enable him to join in it with effect; with effect as to his own soul; with effect as to every object, both public and private, intended by public

worship. Wanderings and forgetfulness, remissions and intermissions of attention, there will be; but these will be fewer and shorter, in proportion as more of this spirit is prevalent within us; and *some* sincere, some hearty, some deep, some true, and, as we trust, acceptable service will be performed, before we leave the place; some pouring forth of the soul unto God in prayer and in thanksgiving; in prayer, excited by wants and weaknesses; I fear also, by sins and neglects without number; and in thanksgivings, such as mercies, the most undeserved, ought to call forth from a heart, filled, as the heart of man should be, with a thorough consciousness of dependency and obligation.

Forms of public worship must, by their very nature, be in a great degree general; that is, must be calculated for the average condition of human and of Christian life: but it is one property of the devotional spirit, which we speak of, to give a particularity to our worship, though it be carried on in a congregation of fellow Christians, and expressed in terms which were

framed and conceived for the use of all. And it does this, by calling up recollections which will apply most closely, and bring home most nearly to ourselves, those terms and those expressions. For instance, in public worship, we thank God in general terms, that is, we join with the congregation in a general thanksgiving; but a devout man brings to church the recollection of special and particular mercies, particular bounties, particular providences, particular deliverances, particular relief, recently experienced, specially and critically granted in the moment of want or danger, or eminently and supereminently vouchsafed to us individually. These he bears in his thoughts: he applies as he proceeds; that which was general, he makes close and circumstantial; his heart rises towards God, by a sense of mercies vouchsafed to himself. He does not, however, confine himself to those favours of Providence, which he enjoys above many others, or more than most others: he does not dwell upon distinctions alone; he sees God in all his goodness, in all his bounty. Bodily ease, for instance, is not less valuable, not

less a mercy, because others are at ease, as well as himself. The same of his health, the use of his limbs, the faculties of his understanding. But what I mean is, that, in his mind, he brings to church mercies, in which he is interested, and that the most general expressions of thankfulness attach with him upon particular recollections of goodness, particular subjects of gratitude; so that the holy fervour of his devotion is supported; never wants, nor can want, materials to act upon. It is the office, therefore, of an internal spirit of devotion to make worship personal. We have seen that it will be so with thanksgiving. It will be the same likewise with every other part of divine worship. The confession of sins in our liturgy, and perhaps in all liturgies, is general; but our sins, alas! are particular: our conscience not only acknowledges a deplorable weakness and imperfection in the discharge of our duty, but is stung also with remembrances and compunctions, excited by particular offences. When we come, therefore, to confess our sins, let memory do its office faithfully. Let these sins rise up before our

eyes. All language is imperfect. Forms, intended for general use, must consist of general terms, and are so far inadequate. They *may* be rehearsed by the lips with very little of application to our own case. But this *will* never be so, if the spirit of devotion be within us. A devout mind is exceedingly stirred, when it has sins to confess. None but a hardened sinner can even think of his sins without pain. But when he is to lay them, with supplications for pardon, before his Maker; when he is to expose his heart to God; it will always be with powerful inward feelings of guilt and calamity. It hath been well said of prayer, that prayer will either make a man leave off sinning, or sin will make him leave off prayer. And the same is true of confession. If confession be sincere, if it be such as a right capacity for devotion will make it to be, it will call up our proper and particular sins so distinctly to our view, their guilt, their danger, their end; whither they are carrying us; in what they will conclude; that, if we can return to them again without molestation from our conscience, then religion is not within us.

If we have approached God in his worship so ineffectually as to ourselves, it is because we have not worshipped him in spirit; we may say of all we have done, "we drew near with our lips, but our hearts were far from him."

What we have said concerning thanksgiving and confession, is likewise true of prayer universally. The spirit of devotion will apply our prayers to our wants. In forms of worship, be they ever so well composed, it is impossible to exhibit human wants otherwise than in general expressions. But devotion will apply them. It will teach every man, in the first place, to know how indigent, how poor a creature, without a continued exercise of mercy and supply of bounty from God, he would be; because, when he begins to enumerate his wants, he will be astonished at their multitude. What are we, any of us, but a complication of wants, which we have not in ourselves the power of supplying? But, besides those numerous wants, and that common helplessness in which we all partake, every man has his own sore,

his own grief, his own difficulties; every man has some distress, which he is suffering, or fearing. Nay, were worldly wishes satisfied, was worldly prosperity complete, he has always what is of more consequence than worldly prosperity to pray for; he has always his sins to pray against. Where temporal wants are few, spiritual wants are often the most and the greatest. The grace of God is always wanted. His governing, his preventing, his inspiring, his assisting grace is always wanted. Here, therefore, is a subject for prayer, were there no other; a subject personally and individually interesting in the highest degree; a subject, above all others, upon which the spirit of devotion will be sure to fix.

I assign, therefore, as the first effect of a right spirit of devotion, that it gives particularity to all our worship. It applies, and it appropriates. Forms of worship may be general, but a spirit of devotion brings them home and close to each and every one.

One happy consequence of which is, that it prevents the tediousness of worship. Things which interest us, are not tedious. If we find worship tedious, it is because it does not interest us as it ought to do. We must allow (experience compels us to allow) for wanderings and inattentions, as amongst the infirmities of our infirm nature. But, as I have already said, even these will be fewer and shorter, in proportion as we are possessed of the spirit of devotion. Weariness will not be perceived, by reason of that succession of devout feelings and consciousness, which the several offices of worship are calculated to excite. If our heart be in the business, it will not be tedious. If, in thanksgiving, it be lifted up by a sense of mercies, and a knowledge from whom they proceed, thanksgiving will be a grateful exercise, and not a tedious form. What relates to our sins and wants, though not of the same gratifying nature, though accompanied with deep, nay, with afflicting cause of humiliation and fear, must, nevertheless, be equally interesting, or more so, because it is of equal concernment to us,

or of greater. In neither case, therefore, if our duty be performed as it ought to be, will tediousness be perceived.

I say, that the spirit of devotion removes from the worship of God the perception of tediousness, and with that also every disposition to censure or cavil at particular phrases, or expressions used in public worship. All such faults, even if they be real, and such observations upon them, are absorbed by the immense importance of the business in which we are engaged. Quickness in discovering blemishes of this sort is not the gift of a pious mind; still less either levity or acrimony in speaking of them.

Moreover, the spirit of devotion reconciles us to *repetitions*. In other subjects repetition soon becomes tiresome and offensive. In devotion it is different. Deep, earnest, heart-felt devotion, naturally vents itself in repetition. Observe a person racked by excruciating bodily pain; or a person suddenly struck with the news of some dreadful calamity; or a person la-

bouring under some cutting anguish of soul; and you will always find him breaking out into ejaculations, imploring from God support, mercy, and relief, over and over again, uttering the same prayer in the same words. Nothing, he finds, suits so well the extremity of his sufferings, the urgency of his wants, as a continual recurrence to the same cries, and the same call for divine aid. Our Lord himself, in his last agony affords a high example of what we are saying: thrice he besought his heavenly Father; and thrice he used the same words. Repetition, therefore, is not only tolerable in devotion, but it is natural; it is even dictated by a sense of suffering, and an acuteness of feeling. It is coldness of affection, which requires to be enticed and gratified by continual novelty of idea, or expression, or action. The repetitions and prolixity of pharisaical prayers, which our Lord censures, are to be understood of those prayers, which run out into mere formality and into great length; no sentiment or affection of the heart accompanying them; but uttered as a task, from an opinion (of which

our Lord justly notices the absurdity), that they should really be heard for their much speaking. Actuated by the spirit of devotion, we can never offend in this way; we can never be the object of this censure.

Lastly, and what has already been intimated, the spirit of devotion will cause our prayers to have an effect upon our practice. For example: if we repeated the *confession* in our liturgy with a true penitential sense of guilt upon our souls, we should not, day after day, be acknowledging to God our transgressions and neglects, and yet go on exactly in the same manner, without endeavouring to make them less and fewer. We should plainly perceive that this was doing nothing towards salvation; and that at this rate, we may be sinning and confessing all our lives. Whereas was the right spirit of confessional piety, viz. thoughtfulness of soul, within us at the time, this would be the certain benefit, especially in the case of an often-repeated sin, that the mind would become more and more concerned, more and more filled with

compunction and remorse, so as to be forced into amendment. Even the most heart-felt confession might not immediately do for us all that we could wish: yet by perseverance in the same, it would certainly in a short time produce its desired effect. For the same reason, we should not time after time *pray* that we might thenceforward, viz. after each time of so praying, lead godly, righteous, and sober lives, yet persist, just as usual, in ungodliness, unrighteousness, and intemperance. The thing would be impossible, if we prayed as we ought. So likewise if real thankfulness of heart accompanied our *thanksgivings*, we should not pray in vain, that we might show forth the praises of God, not only with our lips but in our lives. As it is, thousands repeat these words without doing a single deed for the sake of pleasing God, exclusive of other motives, or refraining from a single thing they like to do out of the fear of displeasing him. So again, every time we hear the third service at church, we pray that God would incline our hearts to keep his commandments; yet immediately, perhaps,

afterwards allow our hearts and inclinations to wander without controul, to whatever sinful temptation enticed them. This, I say, all proceeds from the want of earnestness in our devotions. Strong devotion is an antidote against sin.

To conclude: a spirit of devotion is one of the greatest blessings; and, by consequence, the want of it one of the greatest misfortunes, which a Christian can experience. When it is present, it gives life to every act of worship which we perform; it makes every such act interesting and comfortable to ourselves. It is felt in our most retired moments, in our beds, our closets, our rides, our walks. It is stirred within us, when we are assembled with our children and servants in family prayer. It leads us to church, to the congregation of our fellow-Christians there collected; it accompanies us in our joint offices of religion in an especial manner; and it returns us to our homes holier, and happier, and better; and lastly, what greatly enhances its value to every anxious Christian, it affords to himself a proof that his heart

is right towards God; when it is followed up by a good life, by abstinence from sin, and endeavours after virtue, by avoiding evil and doing good, the proof and the satisfaction to be drawn from it are complete.

SERMON III.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

1 JOHN, iv. 19.

We love him, because he first loved us.

RELIGION may, and it can hardly, I think, be questioned but that it sometimes does, spring from terror, from grief, from pain, from punishment, from the approach of death; and, provided it be sincere, that is, such as either actually produces, or as would produce, a change of life, it is genuine religion, notwithstanding the bitterness, the violence, or, if it must be so called, the baseness and unworthiness of the motive from which it proceeds. We are not to narrow the promises of God; and acceptance is promised to sincere penitence, without specifying the cause from

which it originates, or confining it to one origin more than another. There are, however, higher, and worthier, and better motives, from which religion may begin in the heart; and on this account especially are they to be deemed better motives, that the religion, which issues from them, has a greater probability of being sincere. I repeat again, that sincere religion, from any motive, will be effectual; but there is a great deal of difference in the probability of its being sincere according to the different cause in the mind from which it sets out.

The purest motive of human action is the love of God. There may be motives stronger and more general, but none so pure. The religion, the virtue which owes its birth in the soul to this motive is always genuine religion, always true virtue. Indeed, speaking of religion, I should call the love of God not so much the ground-work of religion, as religion itself. So far as religion is disposition, it is religion itself. But though of religion it be more than the ground-work, yet, being a disposition of

mind, like other dispositions, it is the ground-work of action. Well might our blessed Saviour preach up, as he did, the love of God. It is the source of every thing which is good in man. I do not mean that it is the only source, or that goodness can proceed from no other, but that of all principles of conduct it is the safest, the best, the truest, the highest. Perhaps it is peculiar to the Jewish and Christian dispensations (and if it be, it is a peculiar excellency in them) to have formally and solemnly laid down this principle, as a ground of human action. I shall not deny that elevated notions were entertained of the Deity by some wise and excellent Heathens: but even *these* did not, that I can find, so inculcate the love of that Deity, or so propose and state it to their followers, as to make it a governing, actuating principle of life amongst them. This did Moses, or rather God by the mouth of Moses, expressly, formally, solemnly. This did Christ, adopting, repeating, ratifying, what the law had already declared; and not only ratifying, but singling it out from the body of precepts

which composed the old institution, and giving it a pre-eminence to every other.

Now this love, so important to our religious character, and, by its effect upon that, to our salvation, which is the end of religion; this love, I say, is to be engendered in the soul, not so much by hearing the words of others, or by instruction from others, as by a secret and habitual contemplation of God Almighty's bounty, and by a constant referring our enjoyments and our hopes to his goodness. This is in a great degree a matter of habit; and, like all good habits, particularly mental habits, is what every person must form in himself and for himself by endeavour and perseverance. In this great article, as well as in others which are less, every man must be the author to himself of his train of thinking, be it good or bad. I shall only observe, that when this habit, or, as some would call it, this turn and course of thought, is once happily generated, occasions will continually arise to minister to its exercise and augmentation. A night's rest, or a comfortable meal, will immedi-

ately direct our gratitude to God. The use of our limbs, the possession of our senses; every degree of health, every hour of ease, every sort of satisfaction which we enjoy, will carry our thoughts to the same object. But if our enjoyments raise our affections, still more will our hopes do the same; and, most of all beyond comparison, those hopes which religion inspires. Think of man, and think of heaven; think what he is, and what it is in his power hereafter to become. Think of this again and again; and it is impossible, but that the prospect of being so rewarded for our poor labours, so resting from our past troubles, so forgiven for our repented sins, must fill our hearts with the deepest thankfulness; and thankfulness is love. Towards the author of an obligation which is infinite, thankfulness is the only species of love that can exist.

But moreover the love of God is specifically represented in Scripture as one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The love of God shed abroad in the heart, is described as one of the works of the Spirit upon the souls of Christians. Now whatever is re-

presented in Scripture to be the gift of the Spirit, is to be sought for by earnest and peculiar prayer. That is the practical use to be made of, and the practical consequence to be drawn from, such representations: the very purpose probably for which they were delivered; the mere point of doctrine being seldom that in which Scripture declarations rest. Let us not fail therefore; let us not cease to entreat the Father of mercies, that the love of him may be shed abroad in our hearts continually. It is one of the things in which we are sure that our prayers are right in their object; in which also we may humbly hope, that, unless obstructed by ourselves, they will not be in vain.

Nor let it be said that this aid is superfluous, forasmuch as nature herself had provided sufficient means for exciting this sentiment. This is true with respect to those who are in the full, or in any thing near the full enjoyment of the gifts of nature. With them I do allow that nothing but a criminal stupefaction can hinder the love of God from being felt. But this is

not the case with all; nor with any at all times. Afflictions, sickness, poverty, the maladies and misfortunes of life, will interrupt and damp this sensation, so far as it depends upon our actual experience of God's bounty. I do not say that the evils of life ought to have this effect: taken in conection with a future state, they certainly ought not; because, when viewed in that relation, afflictions and calamities become trials, warnings, chastisements; and when sanctified by their fruits, when made the means of weaning us from the world, bringing us nearer to God, and of purging away that dross and defilement which our souls have contracted, are in truth amongst the first of favours and of blessings: nevertheless, as an apostle himself confesses, they are for a season grievous; they are disheartening; and they are too apt to produce an unfavourable effect upon our gratitude. Wherefore it is upon these occasions most especially, that the aid of God's Spirit may be required to maintain in our souls the love of God.

Let those, therefore, who are conscious

to themselves that they have not the love of God within them as they ought to have it, endeavour to acquire and to increase this holy principle by seriousness of mind, by habitual meditation, by devout reading, devout conversation, devout society. These are all aids and helps towards inducing upon the mind this most desirable, nay, rather let me call it, this blessed frame and temper, and of fixing us in it; and forasmuch as it is declared in Scripture to be shed abroad in the heart by the Spirit of God, let us labour in our prayers for this best gift.

The next consideration upon the subject is, the fruit and effect of this disposition upon our lives. If it be asked how does the love of God operate in the production of virtuous conduct, I shall answer that it operates exactly in the same manner as affection towards a parent or gratitude towards a human benefactor operates by stirring up a strong rebuke in the mind upon the thought of offending him. This lays a constant check upon our conduct. And this sensation is the necessary accom-

paniment of love; it cannot, I think, be separated from it. But it is not the whole of its influence. Love and gratitude towards a benefactor not only fill us with remorse and with internal shame whenever, by our wilful misbehaviour, we have given cause to that benefactor to be displeased with us; but also prompts us with a desire upon all occasions of doing what we believe he wills to be done, which, with respect to God, is in other words a desire to serve him. Now this is not only a restraint from vice, but an incitement to action. Instructed, as in Christian countries mankind generally are, in the main articles of human duty, this motive will seldom mislead them.

In one important respect the love of God excels all moral principles whatever; and that is, in its comprehensiveness. It reaches every action; it includes every duty. You cannot mention another moral principle which has this property in the same perfection. For instance, I can hardly name a better moral principle than humanity. It is a principle which every one

commends, and justly: yet in this very article of comprehensiveness it is deficient, when compared with the love of God. It will prompt us undoubtedly to do kind and generous, and compassionate things towards our friends, our acquaintance, our neighbours, and towards the poor. In our relation to, and in our intercourse with, mankind, especially towards those who are dependent upon us, or over whom we have power, it will keep us from hardness and rigour, and cruelty. In all this it is excellent. But it will not regulate us, as we require to be regulated, in another great branch of Christian duty, self-government and self-restraint. We may be exceedingly immoral and licentious in sinful indulgences without violating our principle of humanity; at least, without specifically violating it, and without being sensible of violating it. And this is by no means an uncommon case or character, namely, humanity of temper, subsisting along with the most criminal licentiousness, and under a total want of personal self-government. The reason is, that the principle of conduct, though excellent as far as it goes,

fails in comprehensiveness. Not so with the love of God. He, who is influenced by that, feels its influence in all parts of duty, upon every occasion of action, throughout the whole course of conduct.

The thing with most of us to be examined into and ascertained is, whether it indeed guide us at all: whether it be within us an efficient motive. I am far from taking upon me to say that it is essential to this principle to exclude all other principles of conduct, especially the dread of God's wrath, and of its tremendous consequences; or that a person who is deterred from evil actions by the dread of God's wrath, is obliged to conclude, that because he so much dreads God, he cannot love him. I will not venture to say any such thing. The Scripture, it is true, speaking of the love of God, hath said, that perfect love casteth out fear; but it hath not said that in the soul of man this love is ever perfect: what the Scripture hath thus declared of perfect love is no more than what is just. The love of God, were it perfect, that is to say, were it such as his nature,

his relation, his bounty to us deserves; were it adequate either to its object or to our obligation, were it carried up as high as in a perfectly rational and virtuous soul it might be carried, would, I believe, absorb every other motive and every other principle of action whatever, even the fear of God amongst the rest. This principle, by its nature, *might* gain a complete possession of the heart and will, so that a person acting under its influence would take nothing else into the account, would reflect upon no other consequence or consideration whatever. Possibly, nay probably, this is the condition of some higher orders of spirits, and may become ours by future improvement, and in a more exalted state of existence: but it cannot, I am afraid, be said to be our condition now. The love of God subsists in the heart of good men, as a powerful principle of action: but it subsists there in conjunction with other principles, especially with the fear of him. All goodness is in a certain degree comparative; and I think, that he may be called a good man in whom this principle dwells and operates at all. Where-

fore to obtain, when obtained, to cultivate, to cherish, to strengthen, to improve it, ought to form the most anxious concern of our spiritual life. He that loveth God keepeth his commandments; but still the love of God is something more than keeping the commandments. For which reason we must acquire, what many, it is to be feared, have even yet to begin, a habit of contemplating God in the bounties and blessings of his creation. I think that religion can hardly subsist in the soul without this habit in some degree. But the greater part of us, such is the natural dulness of our souls, require something more exciting and stimulating than the sensations which large and general views of nature or of providence produce; something more particular to ourselves, and which more nearly touches our separate happiness. Now of examples of this kind, namely, of direct and special mercies towards himself, no one, who calls to mind the passages and providences of his life, can be destitute. There is one topic of gratitude falling under this head, which almost every man, who is tolerably faithful and exact in his

self-recollections, will find in events upon which he has to look back; and it is this: How often have we been spared, when we might have been overtaken and cut off in the midst of sin? Of all the attributes of God, forbearance, perhaps, is that which we have most to acknowledge. We cannot want occasions to bring the remembrance of it to our thoughts. Have there not been occasions, in which, ensnared in vice, we might have been detected and exposed; have been crushed by punishment or shame, have been irrecoverably ruined; occasions in which we might have been suddenly stricken with death, in a state of soul the most unfit for it that was possible? That we were none of these, that we have been preserved from these dangers, that our sin was not our destruction, that instant judgment did not overtake us, is to be attributed to the long-suffering of God. Supposing, what is undoubtedly true, that the secrets of our conduct were known to him at the time, it can be attributed to no other cause. Now this is a topic which can never fail to supply subjects of thankfulness, and of a species of thankfulness

which must bear with direct force upon the regulation of our conduct. We were not destroyed when we might have been destroyed, and when we merited destruction. We have been preserved for further trial. This is, or ought to be, a touching reflection. How deeply, therefore, does it behove us not to trifle with the patience of God, not to abuse this enlarged space, this respited, protracted season of repentance, by plunging afresh into the same crimes, or other, or greater crimes? It shows that we are not to be wrought upon by mercy; that our gratitude is not moved; that things are wrong within us; that there is a deplorable void and chasm in our religious principles, the love of God not being present in our hearts.

But to return to that with which we set out: religion may spring from various principles, begin in various motives. It is not for us to narrow the promises of God which belong to sincere religion, from whatever cause it originates. But of these principles, the purest, the surest, is the love of

God, forasmuch as the religion which proceeds from it is sincere, constant, and universal. It will not, like fits of terror and alarm, (which yet we do not despise,) produce a temporary religion. The love of God is an abiding principle. It will not, like some other, (and these also good and laudable principles of action, as far as they go,) produce a partial religion. It is coextensive with all our obligations. Practical Christianity may be comprised in three words; devotion, self-government, and benevolence. The love of God in the heart is a fountain, from which these three streams of virtue will not fail to issue. The love of God also is a guard against error in conduct, because it is a guard against those evil influences which mislead the understanding in moral questions. In some measure it supplies the place of every rule. He who has it truly within him, has little to learn. Look steadfastly to the will of God, which he who loves God necessarily does, practise what you believe to be well-pleasing to him, leave off what you believe to be displeasing to

him; cherish, confirm, strengthen the principle itself which sustains this course of external conduct, and you will not want many lessons, you need not listen to any other monitor.

SERMON IV.

MEDITATING UPON RELIGION.

PSALM lxiii. 7.

Have I not remembered thee in my bed: and thought upon thee when I was waking?

THE life of God in the soul of man, as it is sometimes emphatically called, the Christian life, that is, or the progress of Christianity in the heart of any particular person, is marked, amongst other things, by religion gradually gaining possession of the thoughts. It has been said, that if we thought about religion as it deserved, we should never think about any thing else; nor with strictness, perhaps, can we deny the truth of this proposition. Religious concerns do so surpass and outweigh in value and importance all concerns beside,

that, did they occupy a place in our minds proportioned to that importance, they would in truth, exclude every other but themselves. I am not, therefore, one of those who wonder when I see a man *engrossed* with religion: the wonder with me is, that men care and think so little concerning it. With all the allowances which must be made for our employments, our activities, our anxieties about the interests and occurrences of the present life, it is still true, that our forgetfulness, and negligence, and indifference about religion, are much greater than can be excused, or can easily be accounted for by these causes. Few men are so busy, but that they contrive to find time for any gratification their heart is set upon, and thought for any subject in which they are interested: they want not leisure for these, though they want leisure for religion. Notwithstanding, therefore, singular cases, if indeed there be any cases, of being over-religious, over-intent upon spiritual affairs, the real and true complaint is all on the other side, that men think not about them enough, as they ought, as is reasonable, as it is their duty to do. That is the malady and

the mischief. The cast and turn of our infirm and fleshly nature lean all on that side. For, first, this nature is affected chiefly by what we see. Though the things which concern us most deeply be not seen; for this very reason, that they are not seen, they do not affect us as they ought. Though these things ought to be meditated upon, and must be acted upon, one way or other, long before we come actually to experience them, yet in fact we do not meditate upon them, we do not act with a view to them, till something gives us alarm, gives reason to believe that they are approaching fast upon us, that they are at hand, or shortly will be, that we shall indeed experience what they are.

The world of spirits, the world for which we are destined, is invisible to us. Hear St. Paul's account of this matter; "we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." "We walk by faith, not by sight: faith is the evidence of things not seen." Some great invisible agent there

must be in the universe: "the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Now if the great author of all things be himself invisible to our senses, and if our relation to him must necessarily form the greatest interest and concern of our existence, then it follows, that our greatest interest and concern are with those things which are now invisible. "We are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for: but if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." The first infirmity, therefore, which religion has to conquer within us, is that which binds down our attention to the things which we see. The natural man is immersed in sense: nothing takes hold of his mind but what applies immediately to his sense; but this disposition will not do for religion: the religious character is founded in hope, as contradistinguished from experience, in perceiving by the mind what is not perceived by the eye: unless a man can do this, he cannot be religious: and with many it is a great difficulty. This power of hope, which, as

St. Paul observes of it, is that which places the invisible world before our view, is specifically described in Scripture, as amongst the gifts of the Spirit, the natural man standing indeed much in need of it, being altogether of an opposite tendency. Hear St. Paul's prayer for his Roman converts; "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." Again to the Galatians, how does he describe the state of mind of a Christian? "we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith."

Again: another impediment to the thought of religion is the faculty and the habit we have acquired of regarding its concerns as at a distance. A child is affected by nothing but what is present, and many thousands in this respect continue children all their lives. In a degree this weakness cleaves to us all; produces upon us the same effect under a different form; namely, in this way, when we find ourselves necessarily disturbed by near or approaching evil, we have the means of

forgetting the nearness or the approach of that, which must bring with it the greatest evil or the greatest good we are capable of, our change at death. Though we cannot exactly offer any arguments to show that it is either certainly or probably at a distance, yet we have the means of regarding it in our minds as though it were at a distance; and this even in cases in which it cannot possibly be so. Do we prepare for it? no; why? because we regard it in our imaginations as at a distance; we cannot prove that it is at a distance; nay, the contrary may be proved against us: but still we regard it so in our imaginations, and regard it so practically; for imagination is with most men the practical principle. But, however strong and general this delusion be, has it any foundation in reason? Can that be thought at a distance which may come to-morrow, which must come in a few years? In *a very* few years to most of us, in a few years to all, it will be fixed and decided, whether we are to be in heaven or hell; yet we go on without thinking of it, without preparing for it: and it is exceedingly observable, that it is only in religion we thus put

away the thought from us. In the settlement of our worldly affairs after our deaths, which exactly depend upon the same event, commence at the same time, are equally distant, if either were distant, equally liable to uncertainty, as to when the disposition will take place, in these, I say, men are not usually negligent, or think that by reason of its distance it can be neglected, or by reason of the uncertainty when it may happen, left unprovided for. This is a flagrant inconsistency, and proves decisively that religion possesses a small portion of our concern, in proportion with what it ought to do. For instead of giving to it that superiority which is due to immortal concerns, above those which are transitory, perishable, and perishing, it is not even put upon an equality with them; nor with those which, in respect to time, and the uncertainty of time, are under the same circumstances with itself.

Thirdly; the spiritual character of religion is another great impediment to its entering our thoughts. All religion, which is effectual, is and must be spiritual. Offices

and ordinances are the handmaids and instruments of the spiritual religion, calculated to generate, to promote, to maintain, to uphold it in the heart; but the thing itself is purely spiritual. Now the flesh weigheth down the spirit, as with a load and burden. It is difficult to rouse the human constitution to a sense and perception of what is purely spiritual. They who are addicted, not only to vice, but to gratifications and pleasures; they who know no other rule than to go with the crowd in the career of dissipation and amusement: they whose attentions are all fixed and engrossed by business, whose minds from morning to night are counting and computing; the weak, and foolish, and stupid; lastly, which comprehends a class of mankind deplorably numerous, the indolent and slothful; none of these can bring themselves to meditate upon religion. The last class slumber over its interests and concerns; perhaps they cannot be said to forget it absolutely, but they slumber over the subject, in which state nothing as to their salvation gets done, no decision, no practice. There are, therefore, we see,

various obstacles and infirmities in our constitutions, which obstruct the reception of religious ideas in our mind, still more such a voluntary entertainment of them as may bring forth fruit. It ought, therefore, to be our constant prayer to God, that he will open our hearts to the influence of his word, by which is meant that he will so quicken and actuate the sensibility and vigour of our minds, as to enable us to attend to the things which really and truly belong to our peace.

So soon as religion gains that hold and that possession of the heart, which it must do to become the means of our salvation, things change within us, as in many other respects, so especially in this. We think a great deal more frequently about it, we think of it for a longer continuance, and our thoughts of it have much more of vivacity and impressiveness. First, we begin to think of religion more frequently than we did. Heretofore we never thought of it at all, except when some melancholy incident had sunk our spirits, or had terrified our apprehensions; it was either from

lowness or from fright that we thought of religion at all. Whilst things went smoothly, and prosperously, and gaily with us, whilst all was well and safe in our health and circumstances, religion was the last thing we wished to turn our minds to; we did not want to have our pleasure disturbed by it. But it is not so with us now: there is a change in our minds in this respect. It enters our thoughts very often, both by day and by night. "Have I not remembered thee in my bed, and thought upon thee when I was waking?" This change is one of the prognostications of the religious principle forming within us. Secondly, these thoughts *settle* themselves upon our minds. They were formerly fleeting and transitory, as the cloud which passes along the sky; and they were so for two reasons; first, they found no congenial temper and disposition to rest upon, no seriousness, no posture of mind proper for their reception; and secondly, because we, of our own accord, by a positive exertion and endeavour of our will, put them away from us, we disliked their presence, we rejected and cast them out. But it is

not so now; we entertain and retain religious meditations, as being, in fact, those which concern us most deeply. I do not speak of the solid comfort which is to be found in them, because that belongs to a more advanced state of Christian life than I am now considering: that will come afterwards; and, when it does come, will form the support, and consolation, and happiness of our lives. But whilst the religious principle is forming, at least during the first steps of that formation, we are induced to think about religion chiefly from a sense of its vast consequences; and this reason is enough to make wise men think about it both long and closely. Lastly, our religious thoughts come to have a vivacity and impressiveness in them which they had not hitherto: that is to say, they interest us much more than they did. There is a wonderful difference in the light in which we see the same thing, in the force and strength with which it rises up before our view, in the degree with which we are affected by it. This difference is experienced in no one thing more than in religion, not only between different persons, but by the

same person at different times, the same person in different stages of the Christian progress, the same person under different measures of divine grace.

Finally, would we know whether we have made, or are making any advances in Christianity or not? These are the marks which will tell us. Do we think more frequently about religion than we used to do? Do we cherish and entertain these thoughts for a longer continuance than we did? Do they interest us more than formerly? Do they impress us more, do they strike us more forcibly, do they sink deeper? If we perceive this, then we perceive a change, upon which we may ground good hopes and expectations; if we perceive it not, we have cause for very afflicting apprehensions, that the power of religion hath not yet visited us; cause for deep and earnest intercession with God for the much wanted succour of his Holy Spirit.

SERMON V.

OF THE STATE AFTER DEATH.

1 JOHN, iii. 2.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

ONE of the most natural solicitudes of the human mind, is to know what will become of us after death, what is already become of those friends who are gone. I do not so much mean the great question, whether we and they shall be happy or miserable, as I mean the question, what is the nature and condition of that state which we are so soon to try. This solicitude, which is both natural and strong, is some-

times, however, carried too far: and this is the case, when it renders us uneasy, or dissatisfied, or impatient under the obscurity in which the subject is placed; and placed, not only in regard to us, or in regard to common men, but in regard even to the apostles themselves of our Lord, who were taught from his mouth, as well as immediately instructed by his Spirit. Saint John, the author of the text which I have read to you, was one of these; not only an apostle, but of all the apostles, perhaps, the most closely connected with his Master, and admitted to the most intimate familiarity with him. What it was allowed, therefore, for man to know, Saint John knew. Yet this very Saint John acknowledges "that it doth not yet appear what we shall be;" the exact nature, and condition, and circumstances of our future state are yet hidden from us.

I think it credible that this may, in a very great degree, arise from the nature of the human understanding itself. Our Saviour said to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how

shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" It is evident from the strain of this extraordinary conversation, that the disbelief on the part of Nicodemus, to which our Saviour refers, was that which arose from the difficulty of comprehending the subject. Therefore our Saviour's words to him may be construed thus: If what I have just now said concerning the new birth, concerning being born again, concerning being born of the Spirit, concerning the agency of the Spirit, which are all "earthly things," that is, are all things that pass in the hearts of Christians in this their present life, and upon this earth; if this information prove so difficult, that you cannot bring yourself to believe it, by reason of the difficulty of apprehending it; "how shall ye believe?" how would you be able to conquer the much greater difficulties which would attend my discourse, "If I told you heavenly things;" that is to say, if I speak to you of those things which are passing, or which will pass, in heaven, in a totally different state and stage of existence, amongst natures and beings unlike yours? The truth seems to

be that the human understanding, constituted as it is, though fitted for the purposes for which we want it, that is, though capable of receiving the instruction and knowledge, which are necessary for our conduct and the discharge of our duty, has a native original incapacity for the reception of any distinct knowledge of our future condition. The reason is, that all our conceptions and ideas are drawn from experience, (not, perhaps, all immediately from experience, but experience lies at the bottom of them all,) and no language, no information, no instruction, can do more for us, than teach us the relation of the ideas which we have. Therefore, so far as we can judge, no words whatever that could have been used, no account or description that could have been written down, would have been able to convey to us a conception of our future state, constituted as our understandings now are. I am far from saying, that it was not in the power of God, by immediate inspiration, to have struck light and ideas into our minds, of which naturally we have no conception. I am far from saying, that he

could not, by an act of his power, have assumed a human being, or the soul of a human being, into heaven; and have shown to him, or it, the nature and the glories of that kingdom: but it is evident, that, unless the whole order of our present world be changed, such revelations as these must be rare; must be limited to very extraordinary persons, and very extraordinary occasions. And even then, with respect to others, it is to be observed, that the ordinary modes of communication by speech or writing are inadequate to the transmitting of any knowledge or information of this sort: and from a cause, which has already been noticed, namely, that language deals only with the ideas which we have; that these ideas are all founded in experience; that probably, most probably indeed, the things of the next world are very remote from any experience which we have in this; the consequence of which is, that, though the inspired person might himself possess this supernatural knowledge, he could not impart it to any other person not in like manner inspired. When, therefore, the nature and constitution of the

human understanding is considered, it can excite no surprise, it ought to excite no complaint, it is no fair objection to Christianity, "that it doth not yet appear what we shall be." I do not say, that the imperfection of our understanding forbids it (for in strictness of speech, that is not imperfect, which answers the purpose designed by it,) but the present constitution of our understanding forbids it.

"It doth not yet appear," saith the apostle, "what we shall be, but this we know, that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him." As if he had said, Though we be far from understanding the subject either accurately or clearly, or from having conceptions and notions adequate to the truth and reality of the case, yet we know something: this, for instance, we know, that, "when he shall appear, we shall be like him." The best commentary upon this last sentence of Saint John's text may be drawn from the words of Saint Paul. His words state the same proposition more fully, when he tells us (Phil. iii. 21.) "that Christ shall change our vile body, that it

may be like his glorious body." From the two passages together, we may lay down the following points. First, that we shall have bodies. One apostle informs us, that we shall be like him; the other, that our vile body shall be like his glorious body; therefore, we shall have bodies. Secondly, that these bodies shall be greatly changed from what they are at present. If we had had nothing but Saint John's text to have gone upon, this would have been implied. "When he shall appear, we *shall* be like him." We are not like him now, we *shall be* like him; we shall hereafter be like him, namely, when he shall appear. Saint John's words plainly regard this similitude as a future thing, as what we shall acquire, as belonging to what we shall become, in contradistinction to what we are. Therefore, they imply a change which must take place in our bodily constitution. But what Saint John's words imply, Saint Paul's declare. "He shall change our vile bodies." That point, therefore, may be considered as placed out of question.

That such a change is necessary, that such a change is to be expected, is agreeable even to the established order of nature. Throughout the universe this rule holds, *viz.* that the body of every animal is suited to its state. Nay more; when an animal changes its state, it changes its body. When animals, which lived under water, afterwards live in air, their bodies are changed almost entirely, so as hardly to be known by any one mark of resemblance to their former figure; as, for example, from worms and caterpillars to flies and moths. These are common transformations; and the like happens, when an animal changes its element from the water to the earth, or an insect from living under ground to flying abroad in the air. And these changes take place in consequence of that unalterable rule, that the body be fitted to the state; which rule obtains throughout every region of nature with which we are acquainted. Now our present bodies are by no means fitted for heaven. So saith Saint Paul expressly, "Flesh and blood *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God: corruption doth not inherit

incorruption." Between our bodies as they are now constituted, and the state into which we shall come then, there is a physical, necessary, and invincible incongruity. Therefore they must undergo a change, and that change will, first, be universal, at least as to those who shall be saved; secondly, it will be sudden; thirdly, it will be very great. First, it will be universal. Saint Paul's words in the fifteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians are, "we shall all be changed." I do however admit, that this whole chapter of Saint Paul relates only to those who shall be saved; of no others did he intend to speak. This, I think, has been satisfactorily made out; but the argument is too long to enter upon at present. If so, the expression of the apostle, "We shall all be changed," proves only that we who are saved, who are admissible into his kingdom, shall be changed. Secondly, the change will be instantaneous. So Saint Paul describes it; "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead shall be raised incorruptible;" and, therefore, their nature must have undergone the change.

Thirdly, it will be very great. No change, which we experience or see, can bear any assignable proportion to it in degree or importance. It is this corruptible putting on incorruption; it is this mortal putting on immortality. Now it has often been made a question, whether, after so great a change, the bodies, with which we shall be clothed, are to be deemed new bodies, or the same bodies under a new form. This is a question which has often been agitated, but the truth is, it is of no moment or importance. We continue the same to all intents and purposes, so long as we are sensible and conscious that we are so. In this life our bodies are continually changing. Much, no doubt, and greatly is the body of every human being changed from his birth to his maturity; yet, because we are nevertheless sensible of what we are, sensible to ourselves that we are the same, we are in reality the same. Alterations, in the size or form of our visible persons, make no change in that respect. Nor would they, if they were much greater, as in some animals they are; or even if they were total. Vast, therefore, as that change

must be, or rather, as the difference must be between our present and our future bodies, as to their substance, their nature, or their form, it will not hinder us from remaining the same, any more than the alterations, which our bodies undergo in this life, hinder us from remaining the same. We know within ourselves that we are the same; and that is sufficient: and this knowledge or consciousness we shall rise with from the grave, whatever be the bodies with which we be clothed.

The two apostles go one step further when they tell us, that we shall be like Christ himself; and that this likeness will consist in a resemblance to his glorified body. Now of the glorified body of Christ all that we know is this. At the transfiguration upon the mount, the three apostles saw the person of our Lord in a very different state from its ordinary state. "He was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Saint Luke describes it thus: "The fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment

was white and glistening: and behold there talked with him two men, who appeared in glory." Then he adds, "that the apostles, when they awaked, saw his glory." Now I consider this transaction, as a specimen of the change of which a glorified body is susceptible. Saint Stephen, at his martyrdom, saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Saint Paul, at his conversion, saw a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun shining round about him; and in this light Christ then was. These instances, like the former, only show the changes and the appearances of which a glorified body is susceptible, not the form or condition in which it must necessarily be found, or must always continue. You will observe, that it was necessary that the body of our Lord at his transfiguration, at his appearance, after his resurrection, at his ascension into heaven, at his appearance to Stephen, should preserve a resemblance to his human person upon earth, because it was by that resemblance alone he could be known to his disciples, at least by any means of knowledge naturally belonging to them in

that human state. But this was not always necessary, nor continues to be necessary. Nor is there any sufficient reason to suppose, that this resemblance to our present bodies will be retained in our future bodies, or be at all wanted. Upon the whole, the conclusions, which we seem authorised to draw from these intimations of Scripture, are,

First, that we should have bodies.

Secondly, that they will be so far different from our present bodies, as to be suited, by that difference, to the state and life into which they are to enter, agreeably to that rule which prevails throughout universal nature; that the body of every being is suited to its state, and that, when it changes its state, it changes its body.

Thirdly, that it is a question by which we need not at all be disturbed, whether the bodies with which we shall arise be new bodies, or the same bodies under a new form; for,

Fourthly, no alteration will hinder us from remaining the same, provided we are sensible and conscious that we are so; any more than the changes which our visible person undergoes even in this life, and which from infancy to manhood are undoubtedly very great, hinder us from being the same, to ourselves and in ourselves, and to all intents and purposes whatsoever.

Lastly, that though, from the imperfection of our faculties, we neither are, nor, without a constant miracle upon our minds, could be made, able to conceive or comprehend the nature of our future bodies; yet, we are assured, that the change will be infinitely beneficial; that our new bodies will be infinitely superior to those which we carry about with us in our present state; in a word, that, whereas our bodies are now comparatively vile, (and are so denominated,) they will so far rise in glory, as to be made like unto his glorious body; that whereas, through our pilgrimage here, we *have* borne, that which we inherited, the image of the earthy, of our parent the

first Adam, created for a life upon this earth; we shall, in our future state, bear another image, a new resemblance, that of the heavenly inhabitant, the second man, the second nature, even that of the Lord from heaven.

SERMON VI.

ON PURITY OF THE HEART AND AFFECTIONS.

1 JOHN, iii. 2, 3.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

WHEN the text tells us, "that every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself," it must be understood as intending to describe the natural, proper, and genuine effects of this hope, rather, perhaps, than the actual effects, or at least as effects, which, in point of experience, universally follow from it. As hath already

been observed, the whole text relates to sincere Christians, and to these alone: the word *we*, in the preceding part of it, comprises sincere Christians, and no others. Therefore the words *every man* must be limited to the same sort of men, of whom he was speaking before. It is not probable, that in the same sentence he would change the persons and characters concerning whom he discoursed. So that if it had been objected to Saint John, that, in point of fact, every man did not purify himself who had this hope in him, he would have replied, I believe, that these were not the kind of persons he had in his view; that throughout the whole of the text, he had in contemplation the religious condition and character of sincere Christians, and no other. When, in the former part of the text, he talked of *we* being the sons of God, of *we* being like Christ, he undoubtedly meant sincere Christians alone: and it would be strange if he meant any other in this latter part of the text, which is in fact a continuation of the same discourse, of the same subject, nay, a portion of the same sentence.

I have said thus much in order to obviate the contrariety which there seems to be between Saint John's assertion and experience. Experience, I acknowledge, proves the inefficacy, in numerous cases, of religious hope and religious motives: and it must be so: for if religious motives operated certainly and necessarily, if they produced their effect by an infallible power over the mind, we should only be machines necessarily actuated; and that certainly is not the thing which a moral agent, a religious agent, was intended to be. It was intended that we should have the power of doing right, and consequently of doing wrong: for he who cannot do wrong, cannot do right by choice; he is a mere tool and instrument, or rather a machine, whichever he does. Therefore all moral motives, and all religious motives, unless they went to deprive man of his liberty entirely, which they most certainly were not meant to do, must depend for their influence and success upon the man himself.

This success, therefore, is various; but when it fails, it is owing to some vice and

corruption in the mind itself. Some men are very little affected by religious exhortation of any kind, either by hearing or reading. That is a vice and corruption in the mind itself. Some men, though affected, are not affected sufficiently to influence their lives. That is a vice and corruption in the mind, or rather in the heart: and so it will always be found. But I do not so much wonder at persons being unaffected by what others tell them, be those others who they may, preachers, or teachers, or friends, or parents, as I wonder at seeing men not affected by their own thoughts, their own meditations; yet it is so; and when it is so, it argues a deep corruption of mind indeed. We can think upon the most serious, the most solemn subjects, without any sort of consequence upon our lives. Shall we call this seared insensibility? shall we call it a fatal inefficiency of the rational principle within us? shall we confess, that the mind has lost its government over the man?

These are observations upon the state of morals and religion, as we see them in

the world: but whatever these observations be, it is still true, and this is Saint John's assertion, that the proper, natural, and genuine effect of religious hope is to cause us to strive "to purify ourselves, even as he is pure." Saint John strongly fixes our attention, I mean, as he means, such of us as are sincere Christians, upon what we are to be hereafter. This, as to particulars, is veiled from us, as we have observed, by our present nature; but as to generals, as to what is of real importance and concern for us to know (I do not mean but that it might be highly gratifying and satisfactory to know more, but as to what is of the first importance and concern for us to know) we have a glorious assurance; we have an assurance that we shall undergo a change in our nature infinitely for the better; that when he shall appear glorified as he is, we shall be like him. Then the point is, what we are to do, how we are to act, under this expectation, having this hope, with this prospect, placed before our eyes. Saint John tells us, "we are to purify ourselves, even as he is pure."

Now what is the scriptural meaning of purifying ourselves can be made out thus. The contrary of purity is defilement, that is evident; but our Saviour himself hath told us what the things which defile a man are; and this is the enumeration: evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; and the reason given why these are the real proper defilements of our nature is, that they proceed from within, out of the heart: these evil things come from within, and defile the man. The seat, therefore, of moral defilement, according to our Saviour, is the heart; by which we know, that he always meant the affections and the disposition. The seat, therefore, of moral purity must necessarily be the same; for purity is the reverse of defilement: consequently, to purify ourselves, is to cleanse our hearts from the presence and pollution of sin; of those sins, particularly, which reside in, and continue in, the heart. This is the purgation intended in

our text. This is the task of purgation enjoined upon us.

It is to be noticed, that it goes beyond the mere controul of our actions. It adds a further duty, the purifying of our thoughts and affections. Nothing can be more certain, than that it was the design of our Saviour, in the passage here referred to, to direct the attention of his disciples to the heart, to that which is within a man, in contradistinction to that which is external. Now he who only strives to controul his outward actions, but lets his thoughts and passions indulge themselves without check or restraint, does not attend to that which is within him, in contradistinction to that which is external. Secondly, the instances which our Saviour has given, though, like all instances in Scripture, and to say the truth, in all ancient writings, they be specimens and illustrations of his meaning, as to the kind and nature of the duties or the vices which he had in view, rather than complete catalogues, including all such duties or vices by name, so that no other but what are

thus named and specified were intended; though this qualified way of understanding the enumerations be right, yet even this enumeration itself shows, that our Saviour's lesson went beyond the mere external action. Not only are adulteries and fornications mentioned, but evil thoughts and lasciviousness; not only murders, but an evil eye; not only thefts, but covetousness or covetings. Thus by laying the axe to the root; not by lopping off the branches, but by laying the axe to the root, our Saviour fixed the only rule which can ever produce good morals.

Merely controlling the actions, without governing the thoughts and affections, will not do. In point of fact it is never successful. It is certainly not a compliance with our Saviour's command, nor is it what Saint John meant in the text by purifying ourselves.

"Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he," namely, Christ himself, "is pure." It is a doctrine and lesson of the New Testament, not

once, but repeatedly inculcated, that if we hope to resemble Christ in his glorified state, we must resemble him in his human state. And it is a part, and a most significant part of this doctrine, that the resemblance must consist in purity from sin, especially from those sins which cleave and attach to the heart. It is by Saint Paul usually put thus: "If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." "Dead with Christ;" what can that mean; for the apostle speaks to those who had not yet undergone natural death. He explains: "Reckon yourselves to be dead unto sin:" that, you hear, is the death he means. "He, that is dead, is freed from sin;" that is Saint Paul's own exposition of his own words; and then, keeping the sense of the words in his thoughts, he adds; "If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Again, still keeping the same sense in view, and no other sense: "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Once more, but still observe in the same sense,

"We are buried with him by baptism unto death; our old man is crucified with him." The burthen of the whole passage is, that if we hope to resemble what Christ is in heaven, we must resemble what he was upon earth: and that this resemblance must consist specifically in the radical casting off of our sins. The expressions of the apostle are very strong; "that the body of sin may be destroyed. Let not sin reign in your mortal body; obey it not in the lusts thereof: not only in its practices, but in its desires." "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

In another epistle, that to the Colossians, Saint Paul speaks of an emancipation from sin, as a virtual rising from the dead, like as Christ rose from the dead. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God: set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth; for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

In this way is the comparison carried on. And what is the practical exhortation which it suggests? "Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, evil concupiscence, and covetousness;" which is an equivalent exhortation, and drawn from the same premises as that of the text; "Purify yourselves, even as he is pure."

The Scriptures, then, teach that we are to make ourselves like Christ upon earth, that we may become like him in heaven, and this likeness is to consist in purity.

Now there are a class of Christians, and, I am ready to allow, real Christians, to whom this admonition of the text is peculiarly necessary.

They are not those who set aside religion; they are not those who disregard the will of their Maker, but they are those who endeavour to obey him partially, and in this way; finding it an easier thing to do good than to expel their sins, especially those which cleave to their hearts, their af-

fections, or their imaginations, they set their endeavours more towards beneficence than purity. You say we ought not to speak disparagingly of doing good: by no means; but we affirm, that it is not the whole of our duty, nor the most difficult part of it; in particular, it is not that part of it which is insisted upon in the text, and in those other Scriptures that have been mentioned. The text, enjoining the imitation of Christ, upon earth, in order that we may become like him in heaven, does not say, do good even as he went about doing good, but it says, "purify yourselves, even as he is pure:" so saith Saint John, "Mortify the deeds of the body, let not sin reign in you; die with Christ unto sin; be baptised unto Jesus Christ; that is, unto his death; be buried with him by baptism unto death; be planted together in the likeness of his death; crucify the old man, and destroy the body of sin; as death hath no more dominion over him, so let sin no more reign in your mortal bodies:" so Saint Paul. All these strong and significant metaphors are for the purpose of impressing more forcibly upon us this

great lesson: that to participate with Christ in his glory, we must participate with him in his humiliation; and that this participation consists in divesting ourselves of those sins, of the heart especially, and affections, whether they break out into action or not, which are inconsistent with that purity, of which he left us an example, and to the attainment and preservation of which purity, we are most solemnly enjoined to direct our first, strongest, and our most sincere endeavours.

SERMON VII.

OF THE DOCTRINE OF CONVERSION.

MATTHEW, ix. 13.

I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

IT appears from these words, that our Saviour, in his preaching, held in view the character and spiritual situation of the persons whom he addressed; and the differences which existed amongst men in these respects; and that he had a regard to these considerations, more especially in the preaching of repentance and conversion. Now I think, that these considerations have been too much omitted by preachers of the Gospel since, particularly in this very article; and that the doctrine itself has suffered by such omission.

It has been usual to divide all mankind into two classes, the converted and the unconverted; and, by so dividing them, to infer the necessity of conversion to every person whatever. In proposing the subject under this form, we state the distinction in my opinion, too absolutely, and draw from it a conclusion too universal: because there is a class and description of Christians, who, having been piously educated, and having persevered in those pious courses into which they were first brought, are not conscious to themselves of ever having been without the influence of religion, of ever having lost sight of its sanctions, of ever having renounced them; of ever, in the general course of their conduct, having gone against them. These cannot properly be reckoned either converted or unconverted. They are not converted, for they are not sensible of any such religious alteration having taken place with them, at any particular time, as can properly be called a conversion. They are not unconverted, because that implies a state of reprobation, and because, if we call upon them to be converted (which, if they be

unconverted, we ought to do), they will not well understand what it is we mean them to do; and, instead of being edified, they may be both much and unnecessarily disturbed, by being so called upon.

There is, in the nature of things, a great variety of religious condition. It arises from hence, that exhortations, and calls, and admonitions, which are of great use and importance in themselves, and very necessary to be insisted upon, are nevertheless, not wanted by all, are not equally applicable to all, and to some are altogether inapplicable. This holds true of most of the topics of persuasion or warning which a Christian teacher can adopt. When we preach against presumption, for instance, it is not because we suppose that all are presumptuous; or that it is necessary for all, or every one, to become more humble, or diffident, or apprehensive, than he now is: on the contrary, there may amongst our hearers be low, and timorous, and dejected spirits, who, if they take to themselves what we say, may increase a disposition which is already too much; or

be at a loss to know what it is herein that we would enjoin upon them. Yet the discourse and the doctrine may, nevertheless, be very good; and for a great portion of our congregation, very necessary. The like, I think, is the case with the doctrine of conversion. If we were to omit the doctrine of conversion, we should omit a doctrine, which to many, must be the salvation of their souls. To them, all calls without this call, all preaching without this doctrine, would be in vain; and it may be true, that a great part of our hearers are of this description. On the other hand, if we press and insist upon conversion, as indispensable to all for the purpose of being saved, we should mislead some, who would not apprehend how they could be required to turn, or be converted, to religion, who were never, that they knew, either indifferent to it, or alienated from it.

In opposition, however, to what is here said, there are who contend, that it is necessary for every man living to be converted before he can be saved. This opinion undoubtedly deserves serious consi-

deration, because it founds itself upon Scripture, whether rightly or erroneously interpreted is the question. The portion of Scripture upon which they who maintain the opinion chiefly rely, is our Saviour's conversation with Nicodemus, recorded in the third chapter of Saint John's Gospel. Our Saviour is there stated to have said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" and afterwards, as a confirmation, and, in some sort, an exposition, of his assertion, to have added, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It is inferred from this passage, that *all persons whatever* must undergo a conversion, before they be capable of salvation: and it cannot be said that this is a forced or strained inference; but the question before us at present is, is it a necessary inference? I am not unwilling to admit, that this short, but very remarkable conversation, is fairly interpreted of the gift of the Spirit, and that, when this Spirit is given, there is a new birth, a regeneration; but I say, that it is no where de-

termined at what time of life, or under what circumstances, this gift is imparted; nay, the contrary is intimated, by comparing it to the blowing of the wind, which, in its mode of action, is out of the reach of our rules and calculations: "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The effect of this uncertainty is, that we are left at liberty to pray for spiritual assistance; and we do pray for it, in all stages, and under all circumstances of our existence. We pray for it in baptism, for those who are baptised; we teach those who are catechised, to pray for it in their catechism: parents pray for its aid and efficacy to give effect to their parental instructions, to preserve the objects of their love and care from sin and wickedness, and from every spiritual enemy: we pray for it, particularly in the office of confirmation, for young persons just entering into the temptations of life. Therefore spiritual assistance may be imparted at any time, from the earliest to the latest

period of our existence; and whenever it is imparted, there is that being born of the Spirit to which our Saviour's words refer. And, considering the subject as a matter of experience, if we cannot ordinarily distinguish the operations of the Spirit from those of our own minds, it seems to follow that neither can we distinguish when they commence; so that spiritual assistance may be imparted, and the thing designated by our Lord's discourse satisfied, without such a sensible conversion, that a person can fix his memory upon some great and general change wrought in him at an assignable time.

The consciousness of a great and general change may be the fact with many. It may be essentially necessary to many. I only allege, that it is not so to all, so that every person, who is not conscious of such a change, must set himself down as devoted to perdition.

This, I repeat, is all I contend for; for, I by no means intend to say that any one is without sin, and in that sense not to stand in need of conversion; still less, that

any sin is to be allowed, and not on the contrary, strenuously and sincerly resisted and forsaken. I only maintain that there may be Christians, who are, and have been, in such a religious state, that no such thorough and radical change as is usually meant by conversion, is or was necessary for them; and that they need not be made miserable by the want of consciousness of such a change.

I do not, in the smallest degree, mean to undervalue, or speak lightly of such changes, whenever or in whomsoever they take place; nor to deny that they may be sudden, yet lasting (nay, I am rather inclined to think that it is in this manner that they frequently do take place); nor to dispute what is upon good testimony alleged concerning conversion brought about by affecting incidents of life; by striking passages of Scripture; by impressive discourses from the pulpit; by what we meet with in books; or even by single touching sentences or expressions in such discourses or books. I am not disposed to question

these relations unnecessarily, but rather to bless God for such instances, when I hear of them, and to regard them as merciful ordinations of his providence.

But it will be said, that conversion implies a revolution of opinion. Admitting this to be so, such a change or revolution cannot be necessary to all, because there is no system of religious opinions in which some have not been brought up from the beginning. To change from error to truth in any great and important article of religious belief, deserves, I allow, the name of conversion; but all cannot be educated in error, on whatever side truth be supposed to lie.

To me, then, it appears, that, although it cannot be stated with safety, or without leading to consequences which may confound and alarm many good men, that conversion is necessary to all, and under all circumstances; yet I think, that there are two topics of exhortation, which together comprise the whole Christian life, and one or other of which belongs to every

man living, and these two topics are conversion and improvement; when conversion is not wanted, improvement is.

Now this respective preaching of conversion or improvement, according to the respective spiritual condition of those who hear us, or read what we write, is authorised by the example of Scripture preaching, as set forth in the New Testament. It is remarkable, that in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, we read incessantly of the preaching of repentance, which I admit to mean conversion. Saint John the Baptist's preaching set out with it: our Lord's own preaching set out with it. It was the subject which he charged upon his twelve apostles to preach. It was the subject which he sent forth his seventy disciples to preach. It was the subject which the first missionaries of Christianity pronounced and preached in every place which they came to, in the course of their progress through different countries. Whereas, in the epistles written by the same persons, we hear proportionably much less of repentance, and much more

of advance, proficiency, progress, and improvement in holiness of life; and of rules and maxims for the leading of a holy and godly life. These exhortations to continual improvement, to sincere, strenuous, and continual endeavours after improvement, are delivered under a variety of expressions, but with a strength and earnestness sufficient to show what the apostles thought of the importance of what they were teaching.

Now the reason of the difference is, that the preaching of Christ and his apostles, as recorded in the Gospels, and in the Acts of the Apostles, was addressed to Jews and Gentiles, whom they called upon to become disciples of the new religion. This call evidently implied repentance and conversion. But the epistles, which the apostles, and some of which the same apostles, wrote afterwards, were addressed to persons already become Christians; and to some, who, like Timothy, had been such from their earliest youth. Speaking to these, you find, they dwell upon improvement, proficiency, continued endeavours

after higher and greater degrees of holiness and purity, instead of saying so much about repentance and conversion. This conduct was highly rational, and was an adaptation of their instruction to the circumstances of the persons whom they addressed, and may be an example to us, in modelling our exhortations to the different spiritual conditions of our hearers.

Seeing, then, that two great topics of our preaching must always be conversion and improvement; it remains to be considered, who they are to whom we must preach conversion, and who they are to whom we must preach improvement.

First; Now of the persons in our congregations, to whom we not only may, but must, preach the doctrine of conversion plainly and directly, are those who, with the name indeed of Christians, have hitherto passed their lives without any internal religion whatever; who have not at all thought upon the subject; who, a few easy and customary forms excepted (and which with them are mere forms), cannot truly

say of themselves, that they have done one action, which they would not have done equally, if there had been no such thing as a God in the world; or that they have ever sacrificed any passion, any present enjoyment, or even any inclination of their minds, to the restraints and prohibitions of religion; with whom indeed religious motives have not weighed a feather in the scale against interest or pleasure. To these it is utterly necessary that we preach conversion. At this day we have not Jews and Gentiles to preach to; but these persons are really in as unconverted a state, as any Jew or Gentile could be in our Saviour's time. They are no more Christians, as to any actual benefit of Christianity to their souls, than the most hardened Jew, or the most profligate Gentile was in the age of the Gospel. As to any difference in the two cases, the difference is all against them. These must be converted, before they can be saved. The course of their thoughts must be changed, the very principles upon which they act must be changed. Considerations, which never, or which hardly ever, entered into

their minds must deeply and perpetually engage them. Views and motives, which did not influence them at all, either as checks from doing evil, or as inducements to do good, must become the views and motives which they regularly consult, and by which they are guided: that is to say, there must be a revolution of principle; the visible conduct will follow the change; but there must be a revolution within. A change so entire, so deep, so important as this, I do allow to be a conversion; and no one, who is in the situation above described, can be saved without undergoing it; and he must necessarily both be sensible of it at the time, and remember it all his life afterwards. It is too momentous an event ever to be forgot. A man might as easily forget his escape from a shipwreck. Whether it was sudden, or whether it was gradual, if it was effected (and the fruits will prove that), it was a true conversion: and every such person may justly both believe and say of himself, that he was converted at a particular assignable time. It may not be necessary to speak of his conversion, but he will always

think of it with undoubted thankfulness to the Giver of all grace, the Author of all mercies, spiritual as well as temporal.

Secondly; The next description of persons, to whom we must preach conversion, properly so called, are those who *allow themselves* in the course and habit of some particular sin. With more or less regularity in other articles of behaviour, there is some particular sin, which they practise constantly and habitually, and allow themselves in that practice. Other sins they strive against; but in this they allow themselves. Now no man can go on in this course, consistently with the hope of salvation. Therefore it must be broken off. The essential and precise difference between a child of God and another is, not so much in the number of sins into which he may fall (though that undoubtedly be a great difference, yet it is not a precise difference; that is to say, a difference, in which an exact line of separation can be drawn), but the precise difference is, that the true child of God *allows himself* in no sin whatever. Cost what it may, he con-

tends against, he combats, all sin; which he certainly cannot be said to do, who is still in the course and habit of some particular sin; for as to that sin, he reserves it, he compromises it. Against other sins, and other sorts of sin, he may strive; in this he allows himself. If the child of God sin, he does not allow himself in the sin: on the contrary, he grieves, he repents, he rises again; which is a different thing from proceeding in a settled self-allowed course of sinning. Sins which are compatible with sincerity, are much more likely to be objects of God's forgiveness, than sins that are not so; which is the case with allowed sins. Are there then some sins, in which we live continually? some duties, which we continually neglect? we are not children of God; we are not sincere disciples of Christ. The allowed prevalence of any one known sin is sufficient to exclude us from the character of God's children. And we must be converted from that sin, in order to become such. Here then we must preach conversion. The habitual drunkard, the habitual fornicator, the habitual cheat must be converted. Now such a change

of principle, of opinion, and of sentiment, as no longer to allow ourselves in that in which we did allow ourselves, and the actual sacrifice of a habit, the breaking off of a course of sinful indulgence, or of unfair gain in pursuance of the new and serious views which we have formed of these subjects, is a conversion. The breaking off of a habit, especially when we had placed much of our gratification in it, is alone so great a thing, and such a step in our Christian life, as to merit the name of conversion. Then as to the time of our conversion, there can be little question about that. The drunkard was converted when he left off drinking; the fornicator, when he gave up his criminal indulgences, haunts, and connections; the cheat, when he quitted dishonest practices, however gainful and successful: provided, in these several cases, that religious views and motives influenced the determination, and a religious character accompanied and followed these sacrifices.

In these two cases, therefore, men must be converted and live; or remain uncon-

verted and die. And the time of conversion can be ascertained. There must that pass within them, at some particular assignable time, which is properly a conversion; and will, all their lives, be remembered as such. This description, without all doubt, comprehends great numbers; and it is each person's business to settle with himself, whether he be not of the number; if he be, he sees what is to be done.

But I am willing to believe, that there are very many Christians, who neither have in any part of their lives been without influencing principles, nor have at any time been involved in the habit and course of a particular known sin, or have allowed themselves in such course and practice. Sins, without doubt, they have committed, more than sufficient to humble them to the dust; but they have not, to repeat the same words again, lived in a course of any particular known sin, whether of commission or neglect; and by deliberation, and of aforethought, allowed themselves in such course. The *conversion*, therefore, above

described, cannot apply to, or be required of, such Christians. To these we must preach, not conversion, but *improvement*. Improvement, continual improvement, must be our text, and our topic; improvement in grace, in piety, in disposition, in virtue. Now, I put the doctrine of *improvement*, not merely upon the consideration, which yet is founded upon express Scripture authority, that, whatever improvement we make in ourselves, we are thereby sure to meliorate our future condition, receiving at the hand of God a proportionable reward for our efforts, our sacrifices, our perseverance, so that our labour is never lost, is never, as Saint Paul expressly assures us, in vain in the Lord; though this, I say, be a firm and established ground to go upon, yet it is not the ground upon which I, at present, place the necessity of a constant progressive improvement in virtue. I rather wish to lay down upon the subject this proposition; namely, that continual improvement is essential in the Christian character, as an evidence of its sincerity; that if what we have hitherto done in religion has been

done from truly religious motives, we shall necessarily *go on*; that if our religion be real, it cannot stop. There is no standing still; it is not compatible with the nature of the subject: if the principles which actuated us, be principles of godliness, they must continue to actuate us; and, under this continued stimulus and influence, we must necessarily grow better and better. If this effect do not take place, the conclusion is, that our principles are weak, or hollow, or unsound. Unless we find ourselves grow better, we are not right. For example, if our transgressions do not become fewer and fewer, it is to be feared that we have left off striving against sin, and then we are not sincere.

I apprehend, moreover, that with no man living can there be a ground for stopping, as though there was nothing more left for him to be done. If any man had this reason for stopping, it was the apostle Paul. Yet did he stop; or, did he so judge? Hear his own account: "This I do, forgetting those things that are behind (those things whereunto I have al-

ready attained), and looking forward to those things that are before (to still further improvement), I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." This was not stopping; it was pressing on. The truth is, in the way of Christian improvement, there is business for the best: there is enough to be done for all.

First; in this stage of the Christian life it is fit to suppose, that there are no enormous crimes, such as mankind universally condemn and cry out against, at present committed by us; yet less faults, still clearly faults, are not unfrequent with us, are too easily excused, too soon repeated. This must be altered.

Secondly; we may not avowedly be engaged in any course or habit of known sin, being at the time conscious of such sin; but we may continue in some practices which our consciences cannot, and would not, upon examination, approve, and in which we have allowed the wrongness of the practice to be screened from

our sight by general usage, or by the example of persons of whom we think well; This is not a course to be proceeded in longer. Conscience, our own conscience, is to be our guide in all things.

Thirdly; we may not absolutely *omit* any duty to our families, our station, our neighbourhood, or the public with which we are acquainted; but might not these duties be more effectively performed, if they were gone about with more diligence than we have hitherto used? and might not further means and opportunities of doing good be found out, if we took sufficient pains to inquire and to consider?

Fourthly, again; even where less is to be blamed in our lives, much may remain to be set right in our hearts, our tempers, and dispositions. Let our affections grow more and more pure and holy, our hearts more and more lifted up to God, and loosened from this present world; not from its duties, but from its passions, its temptations, its over-anxieties, and great selfishness; our souls cleansed from the dross

and corruption which they have contracted in their passage through it.

Fifthly; it is no slight work to bring our *tempers* to what they should be; gentle, patient, placable, compassionate; slow to be offended, soon to be appeased; free from envy, which though a necessary, is a difficult, attainment: free from bursts of anger; from aversions to particular persons, which is hatred; able heartily to rejoice with them that do rejoice; and, from true tenderness of mind, weeping, even when we can do no more, with them that weep; in a word, to put on charity with all those qualities with which Saint Paul hath clothed it, 1 Cor. xiii. which read for this purpose.

Sixthly; whilst any good can be done by us, we shall not fail to do it; but even when our powers of active usefulness fail, which not seldom happens, there still remains that last, that highest, that most difficult, and, perhaps, most acceptable, duty to our Creator, resignation to his blessed will in the privations, and pains, and afflic-

tions with which we are visited; thankfulness to him for all that is spared to us, amidst much that is gone; for any mitigation of our sufferings, any degree of ease, and comfort, and support, and assistance, which we experience. Every advanced life, every life of sickness or misfortune, affords materials for virtuous feelings. In a word, I am persuaded, that there is no state whatever of Christian trial, varied and various as it is, in which there will not be found both matter and room for *improvement*; in which a true Christian will not be incessantly striving, month by month, and year by year, to grow sensibly better and better, and in which his endeavours, if sincere, and assisted, as, if sincere, they may hope to be assisted, by God's grace, will not be rewarded with success.

SERMON VIII.

PRAYER IN IMITATION OF CHRIST.

LUKE, v. 16.

And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

THE imitation of our Saviour is justly held out to us, as a rule of life; but then there are many things in which we cannot imitate him. What depends upon his miraculous character must necessarily surpass our endeavours, and be placed out of the reach of our imitation. This reason makes those particulars, in which we *are* able to follow his example, of great importance to be observed by us; because it is to these that our hopes of taking him for our pattern, of treading in his footsteps, are necessarily confined.

Now, our Lord's piety is one of these particulars. We *can*, if we be so minded, pray to God, as he did. We can aim at the spirit, and warmth, and earnestness, of his devotions; we can use, at least, those occasions, and that mode of devotion, which his example points out to us.

It is to be remarked, that a fulness of *mental devotion* was the spring and source of our Lord's visible piety. And this state of mind we must acquire. It consists in this; in a habit of turning our thoughts towards God, whenever they are not taken up with some particular engagement.—Every man has some subject or other, to which his thoughts turn, when they are not particularly occupied. In a good Christian this subject is God, or what appertains to him. A good Christian, walking in his fields, sitting in his chamber, lying upon his bed, is thinking of God. His meditations draw, of their own accord, to that object, and then his thoughts kindle up his devotions; and devotion never burns so bright or so warm, as when it is lighted up from within. The immensity, the stupen-

dous nature of the adorable Being, who made, and who supports, every thing about us, his grace, his love, his condescension towards his reasonable and moral creatures, that is, towards men; the good things which he has placed within our reach; the heavenly happiness which he has put it in our power to obtain; the infinite moment of our acting well and right, so as not to miss of our great reward, and not only to miss of our reward, but to sink into perdition; such reflections will not fail of generating devotion, of moving within us either prayer, or thanksgiving, or both. This is mental devotion. Perhaps the difference between a religious and an irreligious character, depends more upon this mental devotion than upon any other thing. The difference will show itself in men's lives and conversation, in their dealings with mankind, and in the various duties and offices of their station. but it originates and proceeds from a difference in their internal habits of mind, with respect to God; in the habit of thinking of him in private, and of what relates to him; in cultivating these thoughts, or neglecting

them; inviting them, or driving them from us; in forming, or in having formed, a habit and custom, as to this point, unobserved and unobservable by others (because it passes in the mind, which no one can see); but of the most decisive consequence to our spiritual character and immortal interests. This mind was in Christ: a deep, fixed and constant piety. The expressions of it we have seen in all the forms which could bespeak earnestness and sincerity; but the principle itself lay deep in his divine soul; the expressions likewise were occasional, more or fewer, as occasions called, or opportunities offered; but the principle fixed and constant, uninterrupted, unremitted.

But again; our Lord, whose mental piety was so unquestionable, so ardent, and so unceasing, did not, nevertheless, content himself with that. He thought fit, we find, at sundry times, and I doubt not also, very frequently, to draw it forth in actual prayer, to clothe it with words, to betake himself to visible devotion, to retire to a mountain for this express purpose, to

withdraw himself a short distance from his companions, to kneel down, to pass the whole night in prayer, or in a place devoted to prayer. Let all, who feel their hearts impregnated with religious fervour, remember this example; remember, that this disposition of the heart ought to vent itself in actual prayer; let them not either be afraid, nor ashamed, nor suffer any person nor any thing to keep them from this holy exercise. They will find the devout dispositions of their souls strengthened, gratified, confirmed. This exhortation may not be necessary to the generality of pious tempers; they will naturally follow their propensity, and it will naturally carry them to prayer. But some, even good men, are too abstracted in their way of thinking upon this subject; they think that since God seeth and regardeth the heart, if their devotion be *there*, if it be within, all outward signs and expressions of it are superfluous. It is enough to answer, that our blessed Lord did not so think. He had all the fulness of devotion in his soul, nevertheless, he thought it not superfluous to utter and pronounce audible prayer to

God; and not only so, but to retire and withdraw himself from other engagements, nay even from his most intimate and favoured companions, expressly for this purpose.

Again; our Lord's retirement to prayer appears commonly to have followed some signal act and display of his divine powers. He did every thing to the glory of God; he referred his divine powers to his Father's gift; he made them the subject of his thankfulness, inasmuch as they advanced his great work. He followed them by his devotions. Now every good gift cometh down from the Father of light. Whether they be natural, or whether they be supernatural, the faculties, which we possess, are by God's donation; wherefore, any successful exercise of these faculties, any instance in which we have been capable of doing something good, properly and truly so, either for the community, which is best of all, for our neighbourhood, for our families, nay even for ourselves, ought to stir and awaken our gratitude to God, and to call forth that gratitude into actual devo-

tion; at least, this is to imitate our blessed Lord, so far as we can imitate him at all; it is adopting into our lives, the principle which regulated his.

Again; it appears, on one occasion at least, that our Lord's retirement to prayer was preparatory to an important work, which he was about to execute. The manner in which Saint Luke states this instance is thus: — "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God; and when it was day, he called unto him his disciples, and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles." From this statement I infer, that the night, passed by our Lord in prayer, was preparatory to the office which he was about to execute; and surely an important office it was; important to him; important to his religion; important to the whole world. Nor let it be said, that our Lord, after all, in one instance at least, was unfortunate in his choice; of the twelve one was a traitor. That choice was not error; a remarkable prophecy was to

be fulfilled, and other purposes were to be answered, of which we cannot now speak particularly. "I know," says our Lord, "whom I have chosen." But let us confine ourselves to our observation. It was a momentous choice; it was a decision of great consequence; and it was accordingly, on our Lord's part, preceded by prayer; not only so, but by a night spent in prayer. "He continued all night in prayer to God;" or, if you would rather so render it, in a house, set apart for prayer to God. Here, therefore, we have an example given us, which we both *can* imitate, and ought to imitate. Nothing of singular importance; nothing of extraordinary moment, either to ourselves or others, ought to be resolved upon, or undertaken without prayer to God; without previous devotion. It is a natural operation of piety to carry the mind to God, whenever any thing presses and weighs upon it; they who feel not this tendency, have reason to accuse and suspect themselves of want of piety. Moreover, we have for it the direct example of our Lord himself: I believe also, I may add, that we have the

example and practice of good men, in all ages of the world.

Again; we find our Lord resorting to prayer in his last extremity; and with an earnestness, I had almost said, a vehemence of devotion, proportioned to the occasion. The terms in which the Evangelists describe our Lord's devotion in the garden of Gethsemane, the evening preceding his death, are the strongest terms that could be used. As soon as he came to the place, he bid his disciples pray. When he was at the place he said unto them, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." This did not content him; this was not enough for the state and sufferings of his mind. He parted even from them. He withdrew about a stone's cast, and kneeled down. Hear how his struggle in prayer is described. Three times he came to his disciples, and returned again to prayer; thrice he kneeled down, at a distance from them, repeating the same words. Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly: drops of sweat fell from his body, as if it had been great drops of

blood; yet in all this, throughout the whole scene, the constant conclusion of his prayer was, "Not my will, but thine be done." It was the greatest occasion that ever was: and the earnestness of our Lord's prayer, the devotion of his soul, corresponded with it. Scenes of deep distress await us all. It is in vain to expect to pass through the world without falling into them. We have, in our Lord's example, a model for our behaviour, in the most severe and most trying of these occasions: afflicted, yet resigned; grieved and wounded, yet submissive; not insensible of our sufferings, but increasing the ardour and fervency of our prayer, in proportion to the pain and acuteness of our feelings.

But, whatever may be the fortune of our lives, one great extremity, at least, the hour of approaching death, is certainly to be passed through. What ought then to occupy us? what can then support us? Prayer. Prayer, with our blessed Lord himself, was a refuge from the storm; almost every word he uttered, during that tremendous scene, was prayer: prayer the

most earnest, the most urgent; repeated, continued, proceeding from the recesses of his soul; private, solitary: prayer for deliverance; prayer for strength; above every thing, prayer for resignation.

SERMON IX.

ON FILIAL PIETY.

GENESIS, xlvii. 12.

And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families.

WHOEVER reads the Bible at all, has read the history of Joseph. It has universally attracted attention: and, without doubt, there is not one, but many points in it, which deserve to be noticed. It is a strong and plain example of the circuitous providence of God: that is to say, of his bringing about the ends and purposes of his providence, by seemingly casual and unsuspected means. That is a high doctrine, both of natural and revealed religion; and is clearly exemplified in this history. It is,

an useful example, at the same time, of the protection and final reward of virtue, though for a season oppressed and calumniated, or carried through a long series of distresses and misfortunes. I say, it is an useful example, if duly understood, and not urged too far. It shows the protection of Providence to be *with* virtue under all its difficulties: and this being believed upon good grounds, it is enough; for the virtuous man will be assured, that this protection will keep with him *in* and *through* all stages of his existence — living and dying he is in its hands — and for the same reason that it accompanies him, like an invisible guardian, through his trials, it will finally recompense him. This is the true application of that doctrine of a directing providence, which is illustrated by the history of Joseph, as it relates to ourselves — I mean as it relates to those, who are looking forward to a future state. If we draw from it an opinion, or an expectation, that, because Joseph was at length rewarded with riches and honours, therefore we shall be the same, we carry the example further than it will bear. It proves that virtue is

under the protection of God, and will ultimately be taken care of and rewarded; but in what manner, and in what stage of our existence, whether in the present or the future, or in both, is left *open* by the example: and both may, and must depend, upon reasons, in a great measure, unknown to and incalculable by us.

Again; the history of Joseph is a domestic example. It is an example of the ruinous consequences of partiality in a parent, and of the quarrels and contentions in a family, which naturally spring from such partiality.

Again: it is a lesson to all schemers and confederates in guilt, to teach them this truth, that, when their scheme does not succeed, they are sure to quarrel amongst themselves, and to go into the utmost bitterness of mutual accusation and reproach; as the brethren of Joseph, you find, did.

Again; it is a natural example of the effect of adversity, in bringing men to

themselves, to reflections upon their own conduct, to a sense and perception of many things, which had gone on, and might have gone on, unthought of and unperceived, if it had not been for some stroke of misfortune, which roused their attention. It was after the brethren of Joseph had been shut up by him in prison, and were alarmed, as they well might be, for their lives, that their consciences, so far as appears, for the first time, smote them; "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear." This is the natural and true effect of judgments in this world, to bring us to a knowledge of ourselves: that is to say, of those bad things in our lives, which have deserved the calamities we are made to suffer.

These are all *points* in the history; but there is another point in Joseph's character, which I make choice of as the subject of my present discourse; and that is, his dutifulness and affection to his father. Never was this virtue more strongly displayed. It runs, like a thread, through the

whole narrative ; and whether we regard it as a quality to be admired, or, which would be a great deal better, as a quality to be imitated by us, so far as a great disparity of circumstances will allow of imitation (which in principle it always will do), it deserves to be considered with a separate and distinct attention.

When a surprising course of events had given to Joseph, after a long series of years, a most unexpected opportunity of seeing his brethren in Egypt, the first question which he asked them was, "Is your father yet alive?" This appears from the account which Reuben gave to Jacob, of the conference which they had held with the great man of the country, whilst neither of them, as yet, suspected who he was. Joseph, you remember, had concealed himself, during their first journey, from the knowledge of his brethren ; and it was not consistent with his disguise to be more full and particular, than he was, in his inquiries.

On account of the continuance of the

famine in the land, it became necessary for the brethren of Joseph to go a second time into Egypt to seek corn, and a second time to produce themselves before the lord of the country. What had been Joseph's first question on the former visit, was his first question in this, "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? is *he* yet alive?" And they answered, "thy servant, our father, is in good health, he is yet alive:" and they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance.

Hitherto you observe all had passed in disguise. The brethren of Joseph knew nothing who they were speaking to; and Joseph was careful to preserve the secret. You will now take notice, how this affected disguise was broken, and how Joseph found himself forced, as it were, from the resolution he had taken, of keeping his brethren in ignorance of his person. He had proposed, you read, to detain Benjamin: the rest being perplexed beyond measure, and distressed by this proposal, Judah, approaching Joseph, presents a most earnest supplication for the deliver-

ance of the child; offers *himself* to remain Joseph's prisoner, or slave, in his brother's place; and, in the conclusion, touches, unknowingly, upon a string which vibrates with all the affections of the person whom he was addressing. "How shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me; lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father." The mention of this circumstance, and this person, subdued immediately the heart of Joseph: and produced a sudden, and, as it should seem, an undesigned, premature discovery of himself to his astonished family. Then, that is, upon the circumstance being mentioned, Joseph could not refrain himself; and, after a little preparation, Joseph said unto his brethren, "I am Joseph."

The great secret being now disclosed, what was the conversation which immediately followed? The next word from Joseph's mouth was, "Doth my father yet live?" and his brethren could not answer him; surprize had overcome their faculty of utterance. After comforting, however, and encouraging his brethren, who seemed

to sink under the intelligence, Joseph proceeds, "Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, and there will I nourish thee (for yet there are five years of famine), lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen: and ye shall haste, and bring down my father hither."

It is well known that Jacob yielded to this invitation, and passed over with his family into Egypt.

The next thing to be attended to, is the reception which he there met with, from his recovered son. "And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen: and presented himself unto him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me

die, since I have seen thy face; because thou art yet alive." Not content with these strong expressions of personal duty and respect, Joseph now availed himself of his power and station to fix his father's family in the enjoyment of those comforts and advantages, which the land of Egypt afforded in the universal dearth which then oppressed that region of the world. For this purpose, as well as to give another public token to his family, and to the country, of the deep reverence with which he regarded his parent, he introduced the aged patriarch to Pharaoh himself. "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh." The sovereign of Egypt received a benediction from this venerable stranger. "And Joseph (the account proceeds) nourished his father and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread according to their families."

It remains to be seen how Joseph conducted himself towards his father, on the two occasions, in which alone it was left for him to discharge the office, and testify

the affection, of a son; in his sickness, and upon his death. "And it came to pass," we read, "after these things, one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim." Joseph delayed not, you find, to leave the court of Pharaoh, the cares and greatness of his station in it, in order to pay the last visit to his dying parent; and to place before him the hopes of his house and family, in the persons of his two sons. "And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, Who are these? And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them. (Now the eyes of Israel were dim, so that he could not see.) And he brought them near unto him: and he kissed them, and embraced them: and Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo! God hath showed me also thy seed. And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth." Nothing can well be more solemn or interesting, than

this interview; more honourable or consoling to old age, or more expressive of the dignified piety of the best of sons, and the greatest of men.

We now approach the last scene of this eventful history, and the best testimony which it was possible for Joseph to give of the love and reverence with which he had never ceased to treat his father, and that was upon the occasion of his death, and the honours which he paid to his memory; honours, vain, no doubt, to the dead, but so far as they are significations of gratitude or affection, justly deserving of commendation and esteem. "And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people. And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father; and the physicians embalmed Israel. And the Egyptians mourned for him three score and ten days. And Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him

went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt. And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: and there went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company. And they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan; and there they mourned with a great and a very sore lamentation; and he made a mourning for his father seven days."

Thus died, and thus was honoured in his death, the founder of the Jewish nation, who amidst many mercies, and many visitations, sudden and surprising vicissitudes of afflictions and joy, found it the greatest blessing of his varied and eventful life, that he had been the father of a dutiful and affectionate son.

It has been said, and, as I believe, truly, that there is no virtuous quality belonging to the human character, of which there is not some distinct and eminent example to be found in the Bible; no relation, in

which we can be placed, no duty, which we have to discharge, but that we may observe a pattern for it in the sacred history. Of the duty of children to parents, of a son to his father, maintained under great singularities and variations of fortune, undiminished, nay, rather increased by absence, by distance, by unexampled success, by remote and foreign connections, you have seen in this most ancient of all histories, as conspicuous, and as amiable an instance as can be met with in the records of the world, in the purest, best ages of its existence.

SERMON X.

(PART I.)

TO THINK LESS OF OUR VIRTUES, AND MORE OF OUR SINS.

PSALM li. 3.

My sin is ever before me.

THERE is a propensity in the human mind, very general and very natural, yet at the same time, unfavourable in a high degree to the Christian character; which is, that, when we look back upon our lives, our recollection dwells too much upon our virtues; our sins are not, as they ought to be, before us; we think too much of our good qualities, or good actions, too little of our crimes, our corruptions, our fallings off and declension from God's laws, our defects and weaknesses. These we sink and overlook, in meditating upon our good pro-

perties. This, I allow, is natural; because, undoubtedly, it is more agreeable to have our minds occupied with the cheering retrospect of virtuous deeds, than with the bitter humiliating remembrance of sins and follies. But, because it is natural, it does not follow that it is good. It may be the bias and inclination of our minds; and yet neither right nor safe. When I say that it is wrong, I mean, that it is not the true Christian disposition; and when I say that it is dangerous, I have a view to its effects upon our salvation.

I say, that it is not the true Christian disposition; for, first, how does it accord with what we read in the Christian Scriptures, whether we consider the precepts, which are found there, applicable to the subject, or the conduct and example of Christian characters?

Now, one precept, and that of Christ himself, you find to be this: "Ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was

our duty to do." (Luke, xvii. 10.) It is evident, that this strong admonition was intended, by our Saviour, to check in his disciples an overweening opinion of their own merit. It is a very remarkable passage. I think none throughout the New Testament more so. And the intention, with which the words were spoken, was evidently to check and repel that opinion of merit, which is sure to arise from the habit of fixing our contemplation so much upon our good qualities, and so little upon our bad ones. Yet this habit is natural, and was never prohibited by any teacher, except by our Saviour. With him it was a great fault, by reason of its inconsistency with the favourite principle of his religion, humility. I call humility not only a duty, but a principle. Humbled-mindedness is a Christian principle, if there be one; above all, humble-mindedness towards God. The servants to whom our Lord's expression refers, were to be humble-minded, we may presume, towards one another; but towards their Lord, the only answer, the only thought, the only sentiment, was to be, "We are unprofitable servants." And who

were they, that were instructed by our Lord to bear constantly this reflection about with them? Were they sinners, distinctively so called? Were they grievous, or notorious sinners? Nay, the very contrary; they were persons, "who had done all those things that were commanded them!" This is precisely the description which our Lord gives us of the persons to whom his lesson was directed. Therefore you see, that an opinion of merit is discouraged, even in those who had the best pretensions to entertain it; if any pretensions were good. But an opinion of merit an over-weening opinion of merit, is sure to grow up in the heart, whenever we accustom ourselves to think much of our virtues, and little of our vices. It is generated, fostered, and cherished, by this train of meditation we have been describing. It cannot be otherwise. And if we would repress it; if we would correct ourselves in this respect; if we would bring ourselves into a capacity of complying with our Saviour's rule, we must alter our turn of thinking; we must reflect more upon our sins, and less upon our virtues. De-

pend upon it, that we shall view our characters more truly, we shall view them much more safely, when we view them in their defects, and faults, and infirmities, than when we view them only, or principally, on the side of their good qualities; even when these good qualities are real. I suppose, and I have all along supposed, that the good parts of our characters, which, as I contend, too much attract our attention, are, nevertheless, real; and I suppose this, because our Saviour's parable supposes the same.

Another great Christian rule is, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philip. ii. 12.) These significant words "fear and trembling," do not accord with the state of a mind which is all contentment, satisfaction, and self-complacency; and which is brought into that state by the habit of viewing and regarding those good qualities, which a person believes to belong to himself, or those good actions which he remembers to have performed. The precept much better accords with a mind anxious, fearful, and apprehensive; and

made so by a sense of sin. But a sense of sin exists not, as it ought to do, in that breast which is in the habit of meditating chiefly upon its virtues. I can very well believe, that two persons of the same character in truth, may, nevertheless, view themselves in very different lights, according as one is accustomed to look chiefly at his good qualities, the other chiefly at his transgressions and imperfections; and I say, that this latter is the disposition for working out salvation agreeably to Saint Paul's rule and method; that is, "with fear and trembling;" the other is not.

But further; there is, upon this subject, a great deal to be learnt from the examples which the New Testament sets before us. Precepts are short, necessarily must be so; take up but little room; and for that reason, do not always strike with the force, or leave the impression, which they ought to do: but *examples* of character, when the question is concerning character, and what is the proper character, have more weight and body in the consideration, and take

up more room in our minds, than precepts. Now, from one end of the New Testament to the other, you will find the evangelical character to be *contrition*. You hear little of virtue or righteousness; but you hear perpetually of the forgiveness of sins. With the first Christian teachers, "repent, repent," was the burden of their exhortations: the almost constant sound of their voice. Does not this strain of preaching show, that the preachers wished all who heard them, to think much more of offences than of merits? Nay, further, with respect to themselves, whenever this contemplation of righteousness came in their way, it came in their way only to be renounced, as natural, perhaps, and also grateful to human feelings, but as inconsistent and irreconcileable with the Christian condition. It might do for a heathen, but it was the reverse of every thing that is Christian.

The turn of thought which I am recommending, or, rather, which I find it necessary to insist upon, as an essential part of the Christian character, is strongly seen in one particular passage of Saint Paul's writ-

ings; namely, in the third chapter to the Philippians. "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." These were points which, at that time of day, were thought to be grounds of confidence and exultation. But this train of thought no sooner rises in his mind, than the apostle *checks* it, and turns from it to an anxious view of his own deficiencies. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." These are the words of an anxious man. "Not," then he proceeds, "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards

the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." In this passage, you see, that, withdrawing his mind from all notions of perfection, attainment, accomplishment, security, he fixes it upon his deficiencies. Then he tells you, that *forgetting*, that is, expressly putting out of his mind and his thought, the progress and advance which he had already made, he casts his eyes and attention upon those qualities in which he was short and deficient, upon what remained for him yet to do; and this I take to be the true Christian way of proceeding. "Forget those things that are behind;" put out of your thoughts the attainments and progress you have already made, in order to see fully your defects and imperfections.

In another passage, found in a chapter with which all are acquainted, the fifteenth of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, our apostle, having occasion to compare his situation with that of the other apostles, is led to say: "I laboured more abundantly than they all." Saint Paul's labours in the Gospel, labours which consumed his whole

life, were surely what he might reflect upon with complacency and satisfaction. If such reflections were proper in any case, they were proper in his. Yet observe how they are checked and qualified. The moment he had said, "I laboured more abundantly than they all," he added, as it were correcting himself for the expression, "Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me." He magnifies not himself, but the Grace of God, which was with him. In the next place you will observe, that, though the consciousness of his labours, painful, indefatigable labours, and meritorious labours, if ever man's were so — I say, that, though the consciousness of these was present to his mind at the time, yet it did not hinder him from feeling, with the deepest abasement and self-degradation, his former offences against Christ, though they were offences which sprang from error. "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God; but, by the grace of God, I am what I am." The faults of his life were uppermost in his mind. No mention, no

recollection of his services, even when he did happen to recollect them, shut out, even for a single moment, the deep memory of his offences, or covered or concealed it from his view.

In another place, the same apostle, looking back upon the history of his singular and eventful life, exhibits himself to his converts, as how? not as bringing forward his merit, pleading his services, or claiming his reward: but as nothing other, nothing more, than a monument and example of God Almighty's mercy. Sinners need not despair of mercy, when so great a sinner as himself obtained it. Hear his own words: "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Timothy, i. 16.) What could be more humble or self-depressing than this acknowledgment! yet this was Saint Paul's.

The eleventh chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, and also the

twelfth, ought to be read by you on this occasion. They are very remarkable chapters, and very much to our present purpose. It had so happened, that some hostile, and, as it should seem, some false teachers, had acquired a considerable influence and ascendancy in the church which Saint Paul had planted. To counteract which influence it became necessary for him to assert his character, to state his pretensions to credit and authority amongst them at least, and in comparison with those who were leading them astray. He complies with the occasion; and he does accordingly set forth and enumerate his pretensions. But I entreat you to observe, with how many apologies, with what reluctance, and under what strong protestations, he does it; showing most manifestly, how contrary it was to his habit, his judgment, and to the inclination of his mind, to do so. His expressions are such as these: "Would to God ye could bear with me a little in *my folly*; and indeed, bear with me." What was his folly the recital, he was about to give, of his services and pretensions. Though

compelled, by the reason you have heard, to give it, yet he calls it folly to do so. He is interrupted, as he proceeds, by the same sentiment; "That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but, as it were, foolishly in this confidence of boasting." And again referring to the necessity, which drew from him this sort of language: "I am become," says he, "*a fool* in glorying; ye have compelled me."

But what forms, perhaps, the strongest part of the example is, that the apostle considers this tendency to boast and glory, though it was in his gifts, rather than his services, as one of his dangers, one of his temptations, one of the propensities which he had both to guard and struggle against, and, lastly, an inclination, for which he found an antidote and remedy in the dispensations of Providence towards him. Of his gifts, he says, considering himself as nothing, as entirely passive in the hands of God, "of such a one," of a person to whom such gifts and revelations as these have been imparted; "I will glory; yet of myself I will not glory; but in mine in-

firmities." Then he goes on: "lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

After what you have heard, you will not wonder, that this same Saint Paul should pronounce himself to be "the chief of sinners," — "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the chief." (1 Tim. i. 15.) His sins were uppermost in his thoughts. Other thoughts occasionally visited his mind; but the impression which these had made, was constant, deep, fixed, and indelible.

If, therefore, you would imitate Saint Paul in his turn and train of religious thought; if you would adopt his disposition, his frame, his habit of mind, in this important exercise; you must meditate more upon your sins, and less upon your virtues.

Again; and which is another strong, Scriptural reason for the advice I am giv-

ing, the habit of viewing and contemplating our own virtues has a tendency in opposition to a fundamental duty of our religion, the entertaining of a due and grateful sense of the mercy of God in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. The custom of thought which we dissuade, is sure to generate in us notions of merit; and, that not only in comparison with other men, which is by no means good, or likely to produce any good effect upon our disposition, but also in relation to God himself; whereas the whole of that sentiment, which springs up in the mind, when we regard our characters in comparison with those of other men, if tolerated at all, ought to sink into the lowest self-abasement, when we advance our thoughts to God, and the relation in which we stand to him. Then is all boasting, either in spirit or by words, to be done away. The highest act of faith and obedience, recorded in Scripture, was Abraham's consent to sacrifice his son when he believed that God required it. It was the severest trial that human nature could be put upon; and, therefore, if any man who ever lived, were authorized to

boast of his obedience, it was Abraham after this experiment. Yet what says Saint Paul? "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; *but not before God.*" No man's pretensions to glory were greater, yet before God, they were nothing. "By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, lest any man should boast." (Eph. ii. 8, 9.) Here you perceive distinctly, that speaking of salvation, with reference to its cause, it is by grace; it is an act of pure favour; it is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; it is not of works; and that this representation was given, lest any man should boast, that is, expressly for the purpose of beating down and humbling all sentiments of merit or desert in what we do; lest they induce us, as they will induce us, to think less gratefully, or less piously, of God's exceeding love and kindness towards us. There is no proportion between even our best services and that reward, which God hath in reserve for them that love him. Why then are such services to be so rewarded? It is the grace of God; it is the riches of his grace; in

other words, his abounding kindness and favour; it is his love; it is his mercy. In this manner the subject is constantly represented in Scripture; and it is an article of the Christian religion. And to possess our minds with a sense, an adequate sense, so far as it is possible to be so, of this truth, is a duty of the religion. But to be ruminating and meditating upon our virtues, is not the way to acquire that sense. Such meditations breed opinions of merit and desert; of presumption, of pride, of superciliousness, of self-complacency; tempers of mind, in a word, not only incompatible with humility, but also incompatible with that sense of divine love and mercy towards us, which lies at the root of all true religion, is the source and fountain of all true piety.

You have probably heard of the term self-righteousness: you find it much in the writings and discourses of a particular class of Christians, and always accompanied with strong and severe expressions of censure and reprobation. If the term mean the habit of contemplating our virtues, and

not our vices ; or a strong leaning and inclination thereto, I agree with those Christians in thinking that it is a disposition, a turn of mind to be strongly resisted, and restrained, and repressed. If the term mean any other way of viewing our own character, so as to diminish or lower our sense of God Almighty's goodness and mercy towards us, in making us the tender of a heavenly reward, then also I agree with them in condemning it, both as erroneous in its principle, and highly dangerous in its effects. If the term mean something more than, or different from, what is here stated, and what has been enlarged upon in this discourse, then I profess myself not to understand its meaning.

SERMON XI.

(PART II.)

TO THINK LESS OF OUR VIRTUES, AND MORE OF OUR SINS.

PSALM li. 3.

My sin is ever before me.

TO think well is the way to act rightly: because thought is the source and spring of action. When the course and habit of thinking is wrong, the root is corrupt; "and a corrupt tree bringeth not forth good fruit:" do what you will, if the root be corrupt, the fruit will be corrupt also. It is not only true, that different actions will proceed from different trains of thought; but it is also true, that the same actions, the same external conduct, may be very different in the sight of God, ac-

cording as it proceeds from a right, or a wrong, a more or less proper principle and motive, a more or less proper disposition. Such importance is attached to the disposition: of such great consequence is it, that our disposition in religious matters be what it should be. By disposition is meant, the bent or tendency of our inclinations; and by disposition is also meant, the train and habit of our thoughts, two things which are always nearly connected. It is the latter sense, however, in which I use the word; and the particular lesson which I am inculcating, for the conduct of our thoughts, is to think more of our sins, and less of our virtues. In a former discourse I showed that there are strong and positive Scripture precepts, a due regard to which accords with the state of mind of him who fixes his attention upon his sins and defects, and by no means with his state of mind, who hath fixed his attention chiefly upon his virtues: secondly, that Scripture examples, that of Saint Paul most particularly, teach us to *renounce* the thoughts of our virtues, and to entertain deeply and constantly the thoughts of our

sins: thirdly, that the habit here reproved, is inconsistent with a due sense of the love of God, in the redemption of the world. I am now to offer such further reasons as appear to support the rule I have laid down.

And first, there is no occasion whatever to meditate upon our virtues and good qualities. We may leave them to themselves. We need not fear, that they will either be forgotten or undervalued. "God is not unrighteous to forget your works and labour of love:" Hebrews, vi. 10. He will remember them; we need not. They are set down in his book; not a particle will be lost. Blessed are they who have much there; but we need not count them up in our recollection: for, whatever our virtues are or were, we cannot make them better by thinking of them afterwards. We may make them better in future by thinking of their imperfections, and by endeavouring to encounter, to lessen, or remove those imperfections hereafter: but then this is to think, not upon our virtues, but upon our imperfections. Thinking

upon our virtues, as such, has no tendency to make them better, be they what they will. But it is not the same with our sins. Thinking upon these afterwards may make a very great alteration in them, because it may lead to an effectual repentance. As to the act itself, what is past cannot be recalled; what is done cannot be undone: the mischief may possibly be irrevocable and irreparable. But as to the sin, it is different. Deep, true, sincere penitence may, through the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, do away that. And such penitence may be the fruit of meditation upon our sins; cannot possibly come without it. Nay, the act itself may be altered. It is not always that an injury is irreparable. Wrong indeed has been received at our hands: but restitution or compensation may be in our power. When they are so, they are the surest proofs of penitence. No penitence is sincere without them, if they be practicable. This benefit to those, whom we have injured, and an infinitely greater benefit to ourselves than to them, may be the effect of seeing our sins in their true light, which that man never

does, who thinks only, or chiefly, or habitually, upon his virtues. Can a better reason be given for meditating more upon our sins, and less upon our virtues, than this; that one train of thought may be profitable to salvation, the other is profitable for nothing?

It is an exceedingly good observation, that we may safely leave our virtues and good qualities to themselves. And, besides the use we have made of it in showing the superfluity, as well as the danger of giving in to the contemplation of our virtues, it is also a quieting and consoling reflection for a different, and, in some degree, an opposite description of character, that is to say, for tender and timorous consciences. Such are sometimes troubled with doubts and scruples about even their good actions. Virtue was too easy for them, or too difficult; too easy and pleasant to have any merit in it: or difficult by reason of fleshly, selfish, or depraved propensities, still existing unsubdued, still struggling in their unregenerated hearts. These are natural, and, as I

have sometimes known them, very distressing scruples. I think that observations might be offered to remove the ground of them altogether; but what I have at present to suggest is, that the very act of reflection, which leads to them, is unnecessary, provided you will proceed by our rule, *viz.* to leave your virtues, such as they are, to themselves; and to bend the whole force of your thoughts towards your sins, towards the conquest of these.

But it will be said, are we not to taste the comforts of religion? Are we not to be permitted, or rather ought we not to be encouraged, to relish, to indulge, to enjoy these comforts? And can this be done without meditating upon our good actions?

I answer, that this can be done without meditating upon our good actions. We need not seek the comforts of religion in this way. Much we need not *seek* them at all; they will visit us of their own accord, if we be serious and hearty in our

religion. A well-spent life will impart its support to the spirits, without any endeavour, on our part, to call up our merits to our view, or even allowing the idea of merit, to take possession of our minds. There will, in this respect, always be as much difference as there ought to be, between the righteous man and the sinner (or, to speak more properly, between sinners of different degrees,) without taking pains to draw forth in our recollection instances of our virtue, or to institute a comparison between ourselves and others, or certain others of our acquaintance. These are habits, which I hold to be unchristian and wrong; and that the true way of finding and feeling the consolations of religion, is by progressively conquering our sins. Think of these; contend with these; and, if you contend with sincerity, and with effect, which is the proof indeed of sincerity, I will answer for the comforts of religion being your portion. What is it that disturbs our religious tranquillity? What is it that embitters or impairs our religious comfort, damps and checks our religious hopes, hinders us from

relishing and entertaining these ideas, from turning to them, as a supply of consolation under all circumstances? What is it but our sins? Depend upon it, that it is sin, and nothing else, which spoils our religious comfort. Cleanse your heart from sin, and religion will enter in, with all her train of hopes and consolations. For proof of this, we may, as before, refer to the examples of Scripture Christians. They rejoiced in the Lord continually. "The joy of faith," Phil. i. 25. "Joy in the Holy Ghost," Rom. xiv. 17, was the word in their mouths, the sentiment of their hearts. They spake of their religion as of a strong consolation, as of the "refuge, to which they had fled, as of the hope of which they had laid hold, of an anchor of the soul sure and steadfast:" Heb. vi. 18, 19. Their promise from the Lord Jesus Christ was, "your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you:" John, xvi. 22. Was this promise fulfilled to them? read Acts, xiii. 52. "They were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost." "The kingdom of God," saith Saint Paul, "is joy in the Holy Ghost:" Rom. xiv. 17. So

that Saint Paul, you hear, takes his very description and definition of Christianity from the joy which is diffused over the heart; and Saint Paul, I am very confident, described nothing but what he felt. Yet Saint Paul did not meditate upon his virtues; nay, expressly renounced that sort of meditation. His meditations, on the contrary, were fixed upon his own unworthiness, and upon the exceeding stupendous mercy of God towards him, through Jesus Christ his Saviour: at least, we have his own authority for saying, that, in his Christian progress, he never looked back; he forgot that which was behind, whatever it might be, which he had already attained; he refused to remember it, he put it out of his thoughts. Yet, upon this topic of religious joy, hear him again: "we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" Rom. v. 11. and once more, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace;" Gal. v. 22. These last are three memorable words, and they describe not the effects of ruminating upon a man's own virtues, but the fruit of the Spirit.

But it is not one apostle in whom we find this temper of mind, it is in them all. Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Peter thus addresses his converts, "whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 1 Peter, i. 8. This joy covered even their persecutions and sufferings: "wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now, for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations," 1 Peter, i. 6. meaning persecutions. In like manner Saint James saith, "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," that is, persecutions; and why? "knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience:" James, i. 4. Let no one, after these quotations, say, that it is necessary to fix our attention upon the virtues of our character, in order to taste the comforts of religion. No persons enjoyed these comforts in so great perfection, as the Christians whom we read of in Scripture, yet no persons thought so little of their own virtues. What they continually thought upon was the abounding love of

Christ towards them, " in that, whilst they were yet sinners, he died for them," and the tender and exceeding mercies of God in pardon of their sins, through Christ. From this they drew their consolation; but the ground and origin of this train of thought was, not the contemplation of virtue, but the conviction of sin.

But again; the custom of viewing our virtues has a strong tendency to fill us with fallacious notions of our own state and condition. One almost constant deception is this, *viz.* that in whatever quality we have pretensions, or believe that we have pretensions, to excel, that quality we place at the head of all other virtues. If we be charitable, then " charity covereth a multitude of sins." If we be strictly honest, then strict honesty is no less than the bond which keeps society together; and, consequently, is that without which other virtues would have no worth, or rather no existence. If we be temperate and chaste, then self-government being the hardest of all duties, is the surest test of obedience. Now every one of these propositions is

true: but the misfortune is, that only one of them is thought of at the time, and that the one which favours our own particular case and character. The comparison of different virtues, as to their price and value, may give occasion to many nice questions; and some rules might be laid down upon the subject; but I contend, that the practice itself is useless, and not only useless, but delusive. Let us leave, as I have already said, our virtues to themselves, not engaging our minds in appreciating either their intrinsic or comparative value; being assured that they will be weighed in unerring scales. Our business is with our sins.

Again; the habit of contemplating our spiritual acquirements, our religious or moral excellencies, has, very usually, and, I think, almost unavoidably, an unfavourable effect upon our disposition towards other men. A man who is continually computing his riches, almost in spite of himself grows proud of his wealth. A man who accustoms himself to read, and inquire, and think a great deal about his

family, becomes vain of his extraction: he can hardly help becoming so. A man who has his titles sounding in his ears, or his state much before his eyes, is lifted up by his rank. These are effects which every one observes; and no inconsiderable degree of the same effect springs from the habit of meditating upon our virtues. Now humble-mindedness is a Christian duty, if there be one. It is more than a duty; it is a principle. It is a principle of the religion; and its influence is exceedingly great, not only upon our religious, but our social character. They who are truly humble-minded, have no quarrels, give no offence, contend with no one in wrath and bitterness; still more impossible is it for them to *insult* any man, under any circumstances. But the way to be humble-minded is the way I am pointing out, *viz.* to think less of our virtues, and more of our sins. In reading the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, if we could suppose them to be real characters, I should say of them, that the one had just come from ruminating upon his virtues, the other from meditating upon his sins. And mark the

difference; first, in their behaviour; next, in their acceptance with God. The Pharisee, all loftiness, and contemptuousness, and recital, and comparison, full of ideas of merit, views the poor Publican, although withdrawn to a distance from him, with eyes of scorn. The Publican, on the contrary, enters not into competition with the Pharisee, or with any one. So far from looking round, he durst not so much as *lift up* his eyes; but casts himself, hardly indeed presumes to cast himself, not upon the justice, but wholly and solely upon the mercies of his Maker; "God be merciful to me a sinner." We know the judgment which our Lord himself pronounced upon the case: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." Luke, xviii. 14. The more, therefore, we are like the Publican, and the less we are like the Pharisee, the more we come up to the genuine temper of Christ's religion.

Think, then, less of your virtues; more of your sins. Do I hear any one answer, I have no sins to think upon; I have no crimes which lie upon my conscience? I

reply, that this may be true with respect to some, nay, with respect to many persons, according to the idea we commonly annex to the words, sins and crimes; meaning thereby acts of gross and external wickedness. But think further; enlarge your views. Is your obedience to the law of God, what it ought to be, or what it might be? The first commandment of that law is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Is there, upon the subject of this commandment, no matter for thought, no room for amendment? The second commandment is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Is all with us, as it should be, here? Again, there is a spirituality in the commands of Christ's religion, which will cause the man who obeys them truly, not only to govern his actions, but his words; not only his words, but his inclinations, and his dispositions, his internal habits, as well as external life. "Ye have heard that it hath been said of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, He that looketh on a woman to lust after her;" that is, he who

voluntarily indulges, and entertains in his mind an unlawful desire, "hath committed adultery with her already in his heart," is, by the very entertainment of such ideas, instead of striving honestly and resolutely to banish them from his mind, or to take his mind off from them, a sinner in the sight of God. Much the same kind of exposition belongs to the other commandments; not only is murder forbidden, but all unreasonable, intemperate anger and passion; not only stealing, but all hard and unfair conduct, either in transacting business with those who are upon a level with us, or, where it is more to be feared, towards those who are in our power. And do not these points open to us a field of inquiry, how far we are concerned in them? There may not be what, strictly speaking, can be called an act or deed, which is scandalously bad; yet the current of our imaginations, the bent of our tempers, the stream of our affections, may all, or any of them, be wrong, and may be requiring, even at the peril of our salvation, stronger control, a better direction.

Again; there may not be any action, which, singly and separately taken, amounts to what would be reckoned a crime; yet there may be actions, which we give into, which even our own consciences cannot approve; and these may be so frequent with us, as to form a part of the course and fashion of our lives.

Again; it is possible, that some of the miscarriages in conduct, of which we have to accuse ourselves, may be imputable to inadvertency or surprise. But could these miscarriages happen so often as they do, if we exercised that vigilance in our Christian course, which not only forms a part of the Christian character, but is a sure effect of a sincere faith in religion, and a corresponding solicitude and concern about it? Lastly, unprofitableness itself is a sin. We need not do mischief in order to commit sin; uselessness, when we might be useful, is enough to make us sinners before God. The fig-tree in the Gospel was cut down, not because it bore sour fruit, but because it bore none. The parable of the talents (Matthew, xxv. 14.) is pointed expressly

against the simple neglect of faculties and opportunities of doing good, as contradistinguished from the perpetration of positive crimes. Are not all these topics fit matters of meditation in the review of our lives? Upon the whole, when I hear a person say he has no sins to think upon, I conclude, that he has not thought seriously concerning religion at all.

Let our sins, then, be ever before us: if not our crimes, of which it is possible, that, according to the common acceptation of that word, we may not have many to remember; let our omissions, deficiencies, failures, our irregularities of heart and affection, our vices of temper and disposition, our course and habit of giving into smaller offences, meaning, as I do mean, by offences, all those things which our consciences cannot really approve; our slips, and inadvertencies, and surprises, much too frequent for a man in earnest about salvation: let these things occupy our attention; let this be the bent and direction of our thoughts; for they are the thoughts which will bring us to God evangelically:

because they are the thoughts which will not only increase our vigilance, but which must inspire us with that humility as to ourselves, with that deep and abiding, and operating sense of God Almighty's love and kindness and mercy towards us, in and through Jesus Christ our Saviour, which it was one great aim and end of the Gospel, and of those who preached it, to inculcate upon all who came to take hold of the offer of grace.

SERMON XII.

SALVATION FOR PENITENT SINNERS.

LUKE, vii. 47.

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.

IT has been thought an extravagant doctrine, that the greatest sinners were sometimes nearer to the kingdom of heaven than they whose offences were less exorbitant and less conspicuous: yet, I apprehend, the doctrine wants only to be rationally explained, to show that it has both a great deal of truth, and a great deal of use, in it; that it may be an awakening religious proposition to some, whilst it cannot, without being wilfully misconstrued, delude or deceive any.

Of all conditions in the world, the most to be despaired of, is the condition of those who are altogether insensible and unconcerned about religion; and yet they may be, in the mean time, tolerably regular in their outward behaviour; there may be nothing in it to give great offence; their character may be fair; they may pass with the common stream, or they may even be well spoken of; nevertheless, I say, that whilst this insensibility remains upon their minds, their condition is more to be despaired of, than that of any other person. The religion of Christ does not in any way apply to them; they do not belong to it; for are they to be saved by performing God's will? God is not in their thoughts; his will is not before their eyes. They may do good things, but it is not from a principle of obedience to God that they do them. There may be many crimes which they are not guilty of; but it is not out of regard to the will of God that they do not commit them. It does not, therefore, appear, what just hopes they can entertain of heaven upon the score of an obedience which they not only

do not perform, but do not attempt to perform. Then, secondly, if they are to hope in Christ for a forgiveness of their imperfections, for acceptance, through *him*, of broken and deficient services, the truth is, they have recourse to no such hope; beside, it is not imperfection with which they are charged, but a total absence of principle. A man who never strives to obey, never, indeed, bears that thought about him, must not talk of the imperfection of his obedience: neither the word, nor the idea pertains to him; nor can *he* speak of broken and deficient services, who, in no true sense of the term, hath ever served God at all. I own, therefore, I do not perceive what rational hopes religion can hold out to insensibility and unconcernedness; to those who neither obey its rules, nor seek its aid; neither follow after its rewards, nor sue, I mean, in spirit and sincerity, sue, for its pardon. But how, it will be asked, can a man be of regular and reputable morals, with this religious insensibility: in other words, with the want of vital religion in his heart? I answer, that it can be. A general regard

to character, knowing that it is an advantageous thing to possess a good character; or a regard generated by natural and early habit; a disposition to follow the usages of life, which are practised around us, and which constitute decency: calm passions, easy circumstances, orderly companions, may, in a multitude of instances, keep men within rules and bounds, without the operation of any religious principle whatever.

There is likewise another cause, which has a tendency to shut out religion from the mind, and yet hath, at the same time, a tendency to make men orderly and decent in their conduct: and that cause is business. A close attention to business is very apt to exclude all other attentions; especially those of a spiritual nature, which appear to men of business shadowy and unsubstantial, and to want that present reality and advantage which they have been accustomed to look for, and to find in their temporal concerns: and yet it is undoubtedly true, that attention to business frequently and naturally pro-

duces regular manners. Here, therefore, is a case, in which decency of behaviour, shall subsist along with religious insensibility, forasmuch as one cause produces both; an intent application to business.

Decency, order, regularity, industry, application to our calling, are all good things; but then they are accompanied with this great danger, *viz.* that they may subsist without any religious influence whatever; and that, when they do so, their tendency is to settle and confirm men in religious insensibility. For finding things go on very smoothly, finding themselves received and respected without any religious principle, they are kept asleep, as to their spiritual concerns, by the very quietness and prosperity of things around them. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." It is possible to slumber in a fancied security, or rather in an unconsciousness of danger, a blindness to our true situation, a thoughtlessness or stupefaction concerning it, even at the time when we are in the utmost peril of sal-

vation ; when we are descending fast towards a state of perdition. It is not the judgment of an erroneous conscience: that is not the case I mean. It is rather a want of conscience, or a conscience which is never exerted ; in a word, it is an indifference and insensibility concerning religion even in the midst of seeming and external decency of behaviour, and soothed and lulled by this very circumstance. Now, it is not only within the compass of possibility, but it frequently, nay, I hope, it very frequently comes to pass, that open, confessed, acknowledged sins sting the sinner's conscience ; that the upbraidings of mankind, the cry, the clamour, the indignation, which his wickedness has excited, may at length come home to his own soul ; may compel him to reflect, may bring him, though by force and violence, to a sense of his guilt, and a knowledge of his situation. Now I say, that this sense of sin, by whatever cause it be produced, is better than religious insensibility. The sinner's penitence is more to be trusted to, than the seemingly righteous man's security. The one is

roused from the deep forgetfulness of religion, in which he had hitherto lived; good fruit, even fruit unto life everlasting, may spring from the motion which is stirred in his heart. The other remains, as to religion, in a state of torpor. The thing wanted, as the quickening principle, as the seed and germ of religion in the heart, is compunction, convincement of sin, of danger, of the necessity of flying to the Redeemer, and to his religion in good earnest. "They were pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren what shall we do?" This was the state of mind of those who first heard the Gospel, and this is the state of mind still to be brought about, before the Gospel be heard with effect. And sin will sometimes do it, when outward righteousness will not: I mean by outward righteousness, external decency of manners without any inward principle of religion whatever. The sinner may return and fly to God, even because the world is against him. The visibly righteous man is in friendship with the world: and the "friendship of the world

is enmity with God," whensoever, as I have before expressed it, it sooths and lulls men in religious insensibility.

But how, it will be said, is this? Is it not to encourage sin? Is it not to put the sinner in a more hopeful condition than the righteous? Is it not in some measure, giving the greatest sinner the greatest chance of being saved? This may be objected: and the objection brings me to support the assertion in the beginning of my discourse, that the doctrine proposed cannot, without being wilfully misconstrued, deceive or delude any. First, you ask, is not this to encourage sin? I answer, it is to encourage the sinner who repents; and, if the sinner repent, why should he not be encouraged? But some, you say, will take occasion, from this encouragement, to plunge into sin. I answer, that then they wilfully misapply it; for if they enter upon sin intending to repent afterwards, I take upon me to tell them, that no true repentance can come of such intention. The very intention is a fraud: instead of being the parent of true repentance, is itself to

be repented of bitterly. Whether such a man ever repent or not is another question, but no sincere repentance can issue, or proceed from this intention. It must come altogether from another quarter. It will look back when it does come, upon that previous intention with hatred and horror, as upon a plan, and scheme, and design to impose upon, and abuse the mercy of God. The moment a plan is formed of sinning, with an intention afterwards to repent, at that moment the whole doctrine of grace, of repentance, and of course this part of it amongst the rest, is wilfully misconstrued. The grace of God is turned into lasciviousness. At the time this design is formed, the person forming it is in the bond of iniquity, as Saint Peter told Simon he was, in a state of imminent perdition; and this design will not help him out of it. We say, that repentance is sometimes more likely to be brought about in a confessed, nay, in a notorious and convicted sinner, than in a seemingly regular life, but it is of true repentance that we speak, and no true repentance can proceed from a previous intention to repent, I mean an

intention previous to the sin. Therefore no advantage can be taken of this doctrine to the encouragement of sin, without wilfully misconstruing it.

But then you say, we place the sinner in a more hopeful condition than the righteous. But who, let us inquire, are the righteous we speak of? Not they, who are endeavouring, however imperfectly, to perform the will of God; not they, who are actuated by a principle of obedience to him; but men, who are orderly and regular in their visible behaviour without an internal religion. To the eye of man they appear righteous. But if they do good, it is not from the love or fear of God, or out of regard to religion that they do it, but from other considerations. If they abstain from sin, they abstain from it out of different motives from what religion offers; and so long as they have the acquiescence and approbation of the world, they are kept in a state of sleep; in a state, as to religion, of total negligence and unconcern. Of these righteous men there are many; and, when we compare

their condition with that of the open sinner, it is to rouse them, if possible, to a sense of religion. A wounded conscience is better than a conscience which is torpid. When conscience begins to do its office, they will feel things changed within them mightily. It will no longer be their concern to keep fair with the world, to preserve appearances, to maintain a character, to uphold decency, order, and regularity in their behaviour; but it will be their concern to obey God, to think of him, to love him, to fear him; nay, to love him with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their soul, with all their strength; that is, to direct their cares and endeavours to one single point, his will: yet their visible conduct may not be much altered; but their internal motives and principle will be altered altogether.

This alteration must take place in the heart, even of the seemingly righteous. It may take place also in the heart of the sinner: and we say, (and this is, in truth, the whole which we say,) that a conscience pricked by sin, is sometimes, nay,

oftentimes, more susceptible of the impressions of religion, of true and deep impressions, than a mind which has been accustomed to look only to the laws and customs of the world, to conform itself to those laws, and to find rest and satisfaction in that peace, which not God, but the world gives.

SERMON XIII.

SINS OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN.

EXODUS, XX. 5.

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

THESE words form part of the second commandment. It need not be denied, that there is an apparent harshness in this declaration, with which the minds even of good and pious men have been sometimes sensibly affected. To visit the sins of the

fathers upon the children, even to the third and fourth generation, is not, at first sight at least, so reconcileable to our apprehensions of justice and equity, as that we should expect to find it in a solemn publication of the will of God.

I think, however, that a fair and candid interpretation of the words before us will remove a great deal of the difficulty, and of the objection which lies against them. My exposition of the passage is contained in these four articles: — First, that the denunciation and sentence relate to the sin of idolatry in particular, if not to that alone. Secondly, that it relates to temporal, or, more properly speaking, to family prosperity and adversity. Thirdly, that it relates to the Jewish economy, in that particular administration of a visible providence, under which they lived. Fourthly, that at no rate does it affect, or was ever meant to affect the acceptance or salvation of individuals in a future life.

First, I say, that the denunciation and sentence relate to the sin of idolatry in

particular, if not to that alone. The prohibition of the commandment is pointed against that particular offence, and no other. The first and second commandment may be considered as one, inasmuch as they relate to one subject, or nearly so. For many ages, and by many churches, they were put together, and considered as one commandment. The subject to which they both relate, is false worship, or the worship of false gods. This is the single subject, to which the prohibition of both commandments relates: the single class of sins which is guarded against. Although, therefore, the expression be, "the sins of the fathers," without specifying in that clause what sins, yet, in fair construction, and indeed in common construction, we may well suppose it to be that kind and class of sins, for the restraint of which the command was given, and against which its force was directed. The punishment threatened by any law, must naturally be applied to the offence particularly forbidden by that law, and not to offences in general.

One reason why you may not, probably, perceive the full weight of what I am saying, is, that we do not at this day understand, or think much concerning the sin of idolatry, or the necessity or importance of God's delivering a specific, a solemn, a terrifying sentence against it. The sin itself hath in a manner ceased from among us: other sins, God knows, have come in its place; but this, in a great measure, is withdrawn from our observation: whereas in the age of the world, and among those people, when and to whom the ten commandments were promulged, false worship, or the worship of false gods, was the sin which lay at the root and foundation of every other. The worship of the one true God, in opposition to the vain and false, and wicked religions which had then obtained amongst mankind, was the grand point to be inculcated. It was the contest then carried on: and the then world, as well as future ages, were deeply interested in it. History testifies, experience testifies, that there cannot be true morality, or true virtue, where there is

false religion, false worship, false gods: for which reason you find, that this great article (for such it then was) was not only made the subject of a command, but placed at the head of all the rest. Nay, more; from the whole strain and tenour of the Old Testament, there is good reason to believe, that the maintaining in the world the knowledge and worship of the one true God, holy, just, and good, in contradiction to the idolatrous worship which prevailed, was the great and principal scheme and end of the Jewish polity and most singular constitution. As the Jewish nation, therefore, was to be the depository of, and the means of preserving in the world, the knowledge and worship of the one true God, when it was lost and darkened in other countries, it became of the last importance to the execution of this purpose, that this nation should be warned and deterred, by every moral means, from sliding themselves into those practices, those errors, and that crime, against which it was the very design of their institution that they should strive and contend.

The form of expression used in the second commandment, and in this very part of it, much favours the interpretation for which I argue, namely, that the sentence or threatening was aimed against the sin of idolatry alone. The words are, "For I the Lord thy God am a *jealous* God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children." These two things of being jealous, and of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, are spoken of God in conjunction; and in such a manner, as to show, that they refer to one subject. Now jealousy implies a rival. God's being jealous means, that he would not allow any other god to share with himself in the worship of his creatures: that is what is imported in the word jealous; and, therefore, that is the subject to which the threat of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children is applied. According to this interpretation, the following expressions of the commandment, "them that hate me, and them that love me," signify them that forsake and desert my worship and religion, for the worship and religion of other gods,

and them who adhere firmly and faithfully to my worship, in opposition to every other worship.

My second proposition is, that the threat relates to temporal, or more properly speaking, to family prosperity and adversity. In the history of the Jews, most particularly of their kings, of whom, as was to be expected, we read and know the most, we meet with repeated instances of this same threat being both pronounced and executed against their family prosperity: and for this very same cause, their desertion of the true God, and going over, after the example of the nations around them, to the worship of false gods. Amongst various other instances, one is very memorable and very direct to our present argument: and that is the instance of Ahab, who of all the idolatrous kings of Israel, was the worst. The punishment threatened and denounced against his crime was this: "Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha,

the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin." The provocation, you will observe, was the introduction of false gods into his kingdom; and the prophet here not only theatens Ahab with the ruin and destruction of his family, as the punishment of his sin, but points out to him two instances of great families having been destroyed for the very same reason. You afterwards read the full accomplishment of this sentence by the hand of Jehu. Now I consider these instances as, in fact, the execution of the second commandment, and as showing what sense that commandment bore. But if it were so; if the force of the threat was, that in the distribution and assignment of temporal prosperity and adversity, upon a man's family and to a man's race, respect would be had to his fidelity to God, or his rebellion against him in this article of false and idolatrous worship; then is the punishment, as to the nature and justice of it, agreeable to what we see in the constant and ordinary course of God's providence. The wealth and grandeur of families are com-

monly owing not to the present generation, but to the industry, wisdom, or good conduct of a former ancestor. The poverty and depression of a family are not imputable to the present representatives of the family, but to the fault, the extravagance, or mismanagement of those who went before them; of which, nevertheless, they feel the effects. All this we see every day; and we see it without surprise or complaint. What, therefore, accords with the state of things under the ordinary dispensations of Providence as to temporal prosperity and adversity, was, by a special providence, and by a particular sentence, ordained to be the mode, and probably a most efficacious mode of restraining and correcting an offence, from which it was of the utmost importance to deter the Jewish nation.

My third proposition is, that this commandment related particularly to the Jewish economy. In the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, you find Moses with prodigious solemnity, pronouncing the blessings and cursings which awaited the children of Israel under the dispensation to which they

were called; and you will observe, that these blessings consisted altogether of worldly benefits, and these curses of worldly punishments. Moses in effect declared, that, with respect to this peculiar people, when they came into their own land, there should be amongst them such a signal and extraordinary and visible interposition of Providence, as to shower down blessings, and happiness and prosperity upon those who adhered faithfully to the God of their fathers, and to punish with exemplary misfortunes, those who disobeyed and deserted him. Such, Moses told them, would be the order of God's government over them. This dispensation dealt in temporal rewards and punishments. And the second commandment, which made the temporal prosperity and adversity of families depend, in many instances, upon the religious behaviour of the ancestor of such families, was a branch and consistent part of that dispensation.

But, lastly and principally, my fourth proposition is, that at no rate does it affect, or was ever meant to affect, the acceptance,

or salvation of individuals in a future life. My proof of this proposition I draw from the 18th chapter of Ezekiel. It should seem from this chapter that some of the Jews, at that time, had put too large an interpretation upon the second commandment; for the prophet puts this question into the mouth of his countrymen; he supposes them to be thus, as it were, expostulating with God: "ye say, Why? Doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father?" that is the question he makes them ask. Now take notice of the answer: the answer which the prophet delivers in the name of God, is this, "When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, *it* shall die. The son shall *not* bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon *him*:" verses 19, 20.

In the preceding part of the chapter, the prophet has dilated a good deal, and

very expressly indeed, upon the same subject; all to confirm the great truth which he lays down, "Behold all souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, *it* shall die." Now apply this to the second commandment; and the only way of reconciling them together, is by supposing that the second commandment related solely to temporal or rather family adversity and prosperity, and Ezekiel's chapter to the rewards and punishments of a future state. When to this is added what hath been observed that the threat in the second commandment belongs to the crime forbidden in that commandment, namely, the going over to false gods, and deserting the one true God; and that it also formed a part or branch of the Mosaic system, which dealt throughout in temporal rewards and punishments at that time dispensed by a particular providence; when these considerations are laid together, much of the difficulty, and much of the objection, which our own minds may have raised against this commandment, will, I hope, be removed.

SERMON XIV.

HOW VIRTUE PRODUCES BELIEF, AND VICE UNBELIEF.

John, vii. 17.

If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.

IT does not, I think, at first sight appear why our behaviour should influence our belief, or how any particular course of action, good or bad, should affect our assent to any particular propositions which are offered to us; for truth or probability can never depend upon our conduct; the credibility or incredibility of religion is the same, whether we act well or ill, whether we obey its laws or disobey them. Nor is it very manifest, how even our perception of evidence or credibility should be affected by our virtues or vices: because conduct is immediately voluntary, belief is not: one is an act of the will under the

power of motives; the other is an act of the understanding, upon which motives do not, primarily at least, operate, nor ought to operate at all. Yet our Lord, in the text, affirms this to be the case, namely, that our behaviour does influence our belief, and to have been the case from the beginning, that is, even during his own ministry upon earth. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." It becomes, therefore, a subject of serious and religious inquiry, how, why, and to what extent, the declaration of the text may be maintained.

Now the first and most striking observation is, that it corresponds with experience. The fact, so far as can be observed, is as the text represents it to be. I speak of the general course of human conduct, which is the thing to be considered. Good men are generally believers: bad men are generally unbelievers. This is the general state of the case; not without exceptions; for, on the one hand, there may be men of regular external morals, who are yet unbelievers, because though immorality be one

cause of unbelief, it is not the only cause: and, on the other hand, there are undoubtedly many, who, although they believe and tremble, yet go on in their sins, because their faith doth not regulate their practice. But, having respect to the ordinary course and state of human conduct, what our Saviour hath declared is verified by experience. He that doeth the will of God, cometh to believe, that Jesus Christ is of God, namely a messenger from God. A process, some how or other, takes place in the understanding, which brings the mind of him who acts rightly to this conclusion. A conviction is formed, and every day made stronger and stronger. No man ever comprehended the value of Christian precepts, but by conducting his life according to them. When, by so doing, he is brought to know their excellency, their perfection, I had almost said their divinity, he is necessarily also brought to think well of the religion itself. Hear St. Paul: — "The night is far spent: the day is at hand: let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light; let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting

and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ; and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof;" Rom. xiii. 11. It is recorded of this text, that it was the means of the conversion of a very eminent father of the church, St. Austin; for which reason I quote it as an instance to my present purpose, since I apprehend it must have wrought with him in the manner here represented. I have no doubt but that others have been affected in like manner by this or other particular portions of Scripture; and that still greater numbers have been drawn to Christianity by the general impression which our Lord's discourses, and the speeches and letters of his apostles, have left upon their minds. This is sometimes called the internal evidence of our religion; and it is very strong. But inasmuch as it is a species of evidence which applies itself to the knowledge, love, and practice of virtue, it will operate most powerfully where it finds these qualities, or even these tendencies and dispositions subsisting. If this be the effect of

virtuous conduct, and in some proportion, the effect also of each separate act of virtue, the contrary effect must necessarily follow from a contrary course of behaviour. And perhaps it may assist us in unfolding the subject, to take up the inquiry in this order; because if it can be shown why, and in what manner, vice tends to obstruct, impair, and, at length, destroy our faith, it will not be difficult to allow, that virtue must facilitate, support, and confirm it: that, at least, it will deliver us, or keep us free, from that weight of prejudice and resistance which is produced in the mind by vice, and which acts against the reception of religious truth.

Now the case appears to me to be no other than this: A great many persons, before they proceed upon an act of known transgression, do expressly state to themselves the question, whether religion be true or not; and in order to get at the object of their desire (for the real matter to be determined is, whether they shall have their desire gratified or not), in order, I say, to get at the pleasure in some cases,

or in other cases, the point of interest, upon which they have set their hearts, they choose to decide, and they do in fact decide with themselves, that these things are not so certain, as to be a reason for them to give up the pleasure which lies before them, or the advantage, which is now, and which may never be again, in their power to compass. This conclusion does actually take place, and, at various times, must almost necessarily take place, in the minds of men of bad morals. And now remark the effect which it has upon their thoughts afterwards. When they come at another future time to reflect upon religion, they reflect upon it as upon what they had before adjudged to be unfounded, and too uncertain to be acted upon, or to be depended upon: and reflections, accompanied with this adverse and unfavourable impression, naturally lead to infidelity. Herein, therefore, is seen the fallacious operation of sin; first, in the circumstances under which men form their opinion and their conclusions concerning religion; and, secondly, in the effect, which conclusions, which doubts so

formed, have upon their judgment afterwards. First, what is the situation of mind in which they decide concerning religion? and what can be expected from such a situation? Some magnified and alluring pleasure has stirred their desires and passions. It cannot be enjoyed without sin. Here is religion, denouncing and forbidding it on one side: there is opportunity, drawing and pulling on the other. With this drag and bias upon their thoughts, they pronounce and decide concerning the most important of all subjects, and of all questions. If they should determine for the truth and reality of religion, they must sit down disappointed of a gratification, upon which they had set their hearts, and of using an opportunity, which may never come again. Nevertheless they must determine one way or other. And this process, *viz.* a similar deliberation and a similar conclusion, is renewed and repeated, as often as occasions of sin offer. The effect, at length, is a settled persuasion against religion. For what is it, in persons who proceed in this manner, which rests and dwells upon their memories? What is it

which gives to their judgment its turn and bias? It is these occasional decisions often repeated: which decisions have the same power and influence over the man's after-opinion, as if they had been made ever so impartially, or ever so correctly: whereas, in fact, they are made under circumstances which exclude, almost, the possibility of their being made with fairness, and with sufficient inquiry. Men decide under the power and influence of sinful temptation: but, having decided, the decision is afterwards remembered by them, and grows into a settled and habitual opinion, as much as if they had proceeded in it without any bias or prejudice whatever.

The extent to which this cause acts, that is, the numbers who are included in its influence, will be further known by the following observation. I have said, that sinners oftentimes *expressly* state to themselves the question, whether religion be true or not; and that they state to themselves this question, at the time when they are about to enter upon some act of sin,

which religion condemns: and I believe the case so to be. I believe that this statement is often expressly made, and in the manner which I have represented. But there is also a tacit rejection of religion, which has nearly the same effect. Whenever a man deliberately ventures upon an action which he knows that religion prohibits, he tacitly rejects religion. There may not pass in his thoughts every step which we have described, nor may he come expressly to the conclusion: but he acts upon the conclusion; he practically adopts it. And the doing so will alienate his mind from religion, as surely, almost, as if he had formally argued himself into an opinion of its untruth. The effect of sin is necessarily, and highly, and in all cases, adverse to the production and existence of religious faith. Real difficulties are doubled and trebled, when they fall in with vicious propensities; imaginary difficulties are readily started. Vice is wonderfully acute in discovering reasons on its own side. This may be said of all kinds of vice; but, I think, it more particularly holds good of what are called licentious

vices, that is, of vices of debauchery; for sins of debauchery have a tendency, which other species of sin have not so directly, to unsettle and weaken the powers of the understanding, as well as, in a greater degree, I think, than other vices, to render the heart thoroughly corrupt. In a mind so wholly depraved, the impression of any argument, relating to a moral or religious subject, is faint, and slight, and transitory. To a vitiated palate no meat has its right taste; with a debauched mind no reasoning has its proper influence.

But, secondly; have we not also, from Scripture, reason to believe, that God's Holy Spirit will be assisting to those who earnestly pray for it, and who sincerely prepare themselves for its reception; and that it will be assisting to them in this matter of faith in religion. The language of Scripture is, that God gives his Holy Spirit to them that ask it; and moreover, that to them who use and improve it, as they ought, it is given in more and more abundance. "He that hath, to him shall be given more. He that hath not,

from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." Matt. xiii. 12. He who is studious to improve his measure of grace, shall find that measure increased upon him. He who neglects or stifles, neglects through irreligion, carelessness, and heedlessness, buries in sensuality, or stifles by the opposition of sin, the portion of grace and assistance which is vouchsafed to him, he, the Scripture says, will find that portion withdrawn from him. Now, this being the general nature and economy of God's assisting grace, there is no reason why it should not extend to our faith, as well as to our practice; our perceiving the truth, as well as our obeying the truth, may be helped and succoured by it. God's Spirit can have access to our understandings, as well as our affections. He can render the mind sensible to the impressions of evidence, and the power of truth. If creatures, like us, might take upon themselves to judge what is a proper object of divine help, it should seem to be a serious, devout, humble, and apprehensive mind, anxiously desiring to learn and know the truth: and, in order to know it, keeping

the heart and understanding pure and prepared for that purpose; that is to say, carefully abstaining from the indulgence of passions, and from practices which harden and indispose the mind against religion. I say, a mind, so guarding and qualifying itself, and imploring, with devout earnestness and solicitude, the aid of God's Holy Spirit in its meditations and inquiries, seems, so far as we can presume to judge, as meet an object of divine help and favour, as any of which we can form an idea: and it is not for us to narrow the promises of God concerning his assisting grace, so as, without authority, to exclude such an object from it.

From the doctrine which has been thus concisely proposed, various important rules and reflections arise.

First; let not men, involved in sinful courses, wonder at the difficulties which they meet with in religion. It is an effect of sin, which is almost sure to follow. Sin never fails, both to magnify real difficulties and to suggest imaginary ones. It rests

and dwells upon objections, because they help the sinner, in some measure, to excuse his conduct to himself. They cause him to come to a conclusion, which permits the gratification of his passions, or the compassing of his purpose. Deep and various is the deceitfulness of sin, of licentious sins most particularly; for they cloud the understanding; they disqualify men for serious meditation of any kind; above all for the meditation of religion.

Secondly; let them, who ask for more light, first take care to act up to the light which they have. Scripture and experience join their testimony to this point, namely, that they, who faithfully practise what they do know, and live agreeably to the belief which they have, and to the just and rational consequences of that belief, seldom fail to proceed further, and to acquire more and more confidence in the truth of religion; whereas, if they live in opposition to the degree of belief which they have, be it what it may, even *it* will gradually grow weaker and weaker, and, at length, die away in the soul.

Thirdly; let them, who are anxious to arrive at just sentiments of religion, keep their minds in a capable state; that is, free from the bias of former decisions made, or of former doubts conceived, at a time, when the power and influence of sinful temptation was upon them; suggested, in fact, lest they should find themselves obliged to give up some gratification upon which they had set their hearts; and which decisions, nevertheless, and doubts, have the same operation upon their judgments, as if they had been the result of the most pure and impartial reasoning. It is not peculiar to religion; it is true of all subjects, that the mind is sure almost to be misled, which lies under a load of prejudice contracted from circumstances in which it is next to impossible to weigh arguments justly, or to see clearly.

Fourthly; let them, let all, especially those who find themselves in a dissatisfied state of mind, fly to prayer. Let them pray earnestly and incessantly for God's assisting grace and influence; assisting, if it be his good pleasure, as well our minds and understandings in searching after truth,

as our hearts and affections in obeying it. I say again, let us pray unceasingly for grace and help from the Spirit of God. When we pray for any worldly object, we may pray mistakenly. We may be ignorant of our own good; we may err egregiously concerning it. But when we pray for spiritual aid and grace, we are sure that we pray for what we want; for what, if granted, will be the greatest of all blessings. And we pray with hope, because we have this gracious assurance given us by the Lord himself of grace and mercy; "if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Matt. vii. 11.

SERMON XV.

JOHN'S MESSAGE TO JESUS.

MATT. xi. 2, 3.

Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

THESE words state a transaction, to say the least of it, of a singular kind, and well entitled to observation. Some time before our Lord's appearance, John the Baptist had produced himself to the country, as a messenger from God, and as a public preacher. The principal thing which he preached was, that a greater and more extraordinary person than himself, that is to say, no other than the long-foretold and long-expected Messiah, was about shortly to appear in the world; that for the appearance of this person, which would be the

setting up of the kingdom of God upon earth, all men were to prepare themselves by repentance and reformation. Thus did John preach, before it was known or declared, and before he (John himself) knew or declared who this extraordinary person was. It was, as it should seem, upon our Lord's offering himself to John to be baptized of him in Jordan, that John, for the first time, knew and published him to be that person. This testimony and record John afterwards repeated concerning him in this manner, and it is remarkable: "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man, which is preferred before me, for he was before me, and *I knew him not;* but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him; and I knew him not, but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see

the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he, which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God."

It came to pass, that, soon after our Lord's public appearance, John was cast into prison, and *there* remained, till, by a barbarous order from Herod, in wicked compliance with a wicked vow, this good and courageous servant of God was beheaded. It does not seem quite certain, whether he was not imprisoned twice. In prison, however, his disciples, as was natural, came to him, and related to him the great things which Jesus had lately been doing; and it appears from the accounts of the different evangelists, and by laying these accounts together in order of time, that Jesus, a little before this, amongst other miracles, had cured the centurion's servant without coming near him; and had also raised the young man at Nain to life, when they were carrying him out to his funeral: miracles, which, it may be supposed, were much noised abroad in the country. What then did John the Baptist

do, upon receiving this intelligence? He *sent* to Jesus two of his disciples, saying, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?"

It will appear odd that John should entertain any doubt, or require any satisfaction, about this matter: he, who had himself publicly announced Jesus to be the Messiah looked for, and that also upon the most undeniable grounds, because he saw the Spirit descending and remaining upon him; the token which had been given him, whereby this person was to be distinguished by him.

This was a difficulty which interpreters of Scripture, in very early times, saw: and the answer which they gave to it, I believe to be the true one; namely, that John sent this message, not from any doubt which he himself entertained of the matter, but in order that the doubts, which his disciples had conceived about it, might receive an answer and satisfaction from the fountain head; from Jesus himself, who was best able to give it.

You will, therefore, now observe, what this answer was, and how, and under what circumstances, it was given. If you turn to St. Luke's statement of the transaction, chap. vii. verse 20th, you will there find it expressly asserted, what is only implied and tacitly referred to by St. Matthew; (and this is one instance, amongst many, of the advantage of bringing the accounts of the different evangelists together;) you will find, I say, that it so happened, I ought to have said, that it was so ordered by Providence, that at the time, the precise hour, when these messengers from John arrived, our Lord was in the very act of working miracles. In that same hour, says Luke, he cured many of infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave sight; so that the messengers themselves were eye-witnesses of his powers, and of his gifts, and of his mighty works; and to this evidence he refers them; and a more decisive or dignified answer could not possibly have been given. He neither says he was, nor he was not the person they inquired after, but bids them take notice and tell

John of what they *saw*, and make their own conclusion from it. "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached." It does not, I think, appear, nor is it necessary to suppose, that *all* these species of miracles were performed then, or before their eyes. It is specifically mentioned, that he then cured many of plagues and infirmities, cast out evil spirits, and restored sight to the blind: but it is not mentioned, for instance, that he then raised the dead, though that miracle be referred to in his answer. After having wrought, whilst they were present, many and various species of decisive miracles, he was well entitled to demand their credit and assent to others upon his own testimony and assertion.

Now from this answer of our Lord's, we are entitled to infer (and this I think is the useful inference to be drawn from it) that the faith which he required, the assent which he demanded, was a rational assent

and faith founded upon proof and evidence. His exhortation was "believe me for the very works' sake." He did not bid Philip upon that occasion, or the disciples of John upon this, believe him, because he was the Son of God, because he came down from heaven, because he was in the Father and the Father in him, because he was with God and from God, because the Father had given unto him the Spirit without measure, because he was inspired in the fullest and largest sense of the word; for all these characters and pretensions, though the highest that could belong to any being whatsoever, to a prophet, or to more than a prophet, were nevertheless to be ascertained by facts. When ascertained, they were grounds of the most absolute confidence in his word, of the most implicit and unlimited reliance upon his authority; but they were to be ascertained by facts. To facts, therefore, our Lord appeals; to facts he refers them, and to the demonstration which they afforded of his power and truth. For shutting their eyes against faith, or, more properly speaking, for shutting their hearts and under-

standings against the proof and conclusion which facts afforded, he pronounces them liable to condemnation. They were to believe his word, because of his works: that was exactly what he required. "The works which the Father had given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me; and the Father himself who hath sent me, beareth witness of me:" John, v. 36. It is remarkable that John the Baptist wrought no miracle; therefore the authority and confirming proof of *his* mission rested very much upon the evidences which were exhibited, not by himself, but by the person whose appearance he professed to foretell. And undoubtedly the miracles of our Lord did, by a reflected operation, establish the preaching of John. For if a person in these days should appear, not working any miracle himself, but declaring that another and greater person was soon to follow; and if that other and greater person did accordingly soon follow, and show forth mighty deeds, the authority of the first person's mission would be ratified by the second person's works. They who

might doubt, may reasonably doubt, concerning the first person's truth and pretensions *before*, would be fully satisfied of them afterwards. And this was exactly the turn which some rational and considerate Jews gave to the matter: "And many resorted to him, and said, John did no miracle; but all things that John spake of this man were true." The effect of this observation was, what it ought to be, "many believed on him there." John, x. 41, 42.

This distinction between our Lord and his forerunner, in one working miracles, and the other not, furnishes an account for two things which we meet with in the Gospel; one is, John's declaring that when the person of whom he spoke should appear, his own ministry, which was then much followed and attended, would sink in importance and esteem. "He must increase, I must decrease — He that cometh after me is preferred before me — He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to *him*." The

other is our Lord's own reflection upon John's testimony in his favour, which was exactly agreeable to the truth of the case. "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth; but I receive not testimony from man. He was a burning and a shining light; and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But *I* have greater witness than that of John — the *works* which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that *I do*, bear witness of me." As if he had said: My own performance of miracles is a higher and surer proof of my mission, than any testimony which could be given to me by another, who did not perform miracles, however great or praise-worthy, or excellent his character and his preaching were in all respects, or however much his followers confided in him: the one was the testimony of men, the other of God. "I receive not testimony of man;" the proofs which I myself exhibit before your eyes of divine power, supersede human testimony.

Again; our Lord put the truth of his pretensions, precisely and specifically, upon

the evidence of his miracles: John, x. 37. "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not: but if I do, though ye believe me not, believe the works." What fairer appeal could be made? Could more be done to challenge inquiry, or place the question upon the right ground?

Lastly; in the xvth chap. and 24th verse, our Lord fixes the guilt of the unbelieving Jews upon this article, that they rejected miraculous proof, which ought to have convinced them; and that, if they had not had such proof, they might have been excusable, or, comparatively speaking, they would not have had sin. His words are very memorable; "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin."

It appears, therefore, that, as well in the answer to John's messengers, as in the other passages of his history and discourses which resemble this, our Lord acted a part the most foreign and distant from the part of an impostor or enthusiast that can possibly be conceived. Was it for an im-

postor or enthusiast to refer messengers who came to him, to miraculous works performed before their eyes; to things done upon the spot; to the testimony of their own senses. "Show John those things which ye do see and hear." Would, could any other than a prophet come from God do this? In like manner, was it for any other than a divine messenger to bid his very disciples not believe in him, if he did not these works; or to tell unbelievers, that if he had not done among them works which none other man did, their unbelief might have been excusable? In all this we discern conviction and sincerity, fairness, truth, and evidence.

SERMON XVI.

ON INSENSIBILITY TO OFFENCES.

PSALM xix. 12, 13.

Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults. Keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me.

THESE words express a rational and affecting prayer, according to the sense which they carry with them at first sight, and without entering into any interpretation of them whatsoever. Who is there, that will not join heartily in this prayer? for who is there that has not occasion to pray against his sins? We are *laden* with the weight of our sins. "The remembrance of them is grievous to us; the burden of them is intolerable." But beyond this, these same words, when they come to be fully under-

stood, have a still stronger meaning, and still more applicable to the state and condition of our souls; which I will endeavour to set before you.

You will observe the expression, my secret faults: "O cleanse thou me from my *secret* faults." Now the question is, to whom are these faults a secret? to myself, or to others? whether the prayer relates to faults which are concealed from mankind, and are in that sense secret? or to faults which are concealed from the offender himself, and are therefore secret, in the most full and strict sense of which the term is capable? Now, I say, that the context, or whole passage taken together, *obliges* us to understand the word *secret* in this latter sense. For observe two particulars. The first verse of the text runs thus: "Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults." Now, to give a connection to the two parts of this verse, it is necessary to suppose, that one reason, for which it was so difficult for any man to know how oft he offendeth was, that many of his faults were *secret*;

but in what way and to whom secret? to himself undoubtedly: otherwise the secrecy could have been no reason or cause of that difficulty. The merely being concealed from others would be nothing to the present purpose: because the most concealed sins, in that sense, are as well known to the sinner himself, as those which are detected or most open; and therefore such concealment would not account for the sinner's difficulty in understanding the state of his soul and of his conscience. To me it appears very plain, that the train of the Psalmist's thoughts went thus: — He is led to cast back his recollection upon the sins of his life; he finds himself, as many of us must do, lost and bewildered in their number and frequency; because, beside all other reasons of confusion, there were many which were unnoticed, unreckoned, and unobserved. Against this class of sins, which, for this reason, he calls his secret faults, he raises up his voice to God in prayer. This is evidently, as I think, the train and connection of thought; and this requires, that the secret faults here spoken of be explained of such faults

as were secret to the person himself. It makes no connection, it carries with it no consistent meaning, to interpret them of those faults which were concealed from others. This is one argument for the exposition contended for; another is the following. You will observe in the text that two kinds of sins are distinctly spoken of under the name of secret faults, and presumptuous sins. The words are, "O cleanse thou me from my secret faults: keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins." Now it will not do to consider these secret faults as merely concealed faults; because they are not necessarily distinguished from, nor can be placed in opposition to, presumptuous sins. The Psalmist is here addressing God; he is deeply affected with the state of his soul, and with his sins, considered in relation to God. Now, with respect to God, there may be, and there often is, as much presumption, as much daring in committing a concealed sin, as in committing a sin which is open to the world. The circumstance of concealment, or detection, makes no difference at all in this respect; and

therefore they could not properly be placed in different classes; nor would it be natural so to place them: but offences which escape the sinner's own notice at the time, may certainly be distinguished from those which are committed with a high hand, with a full knowledge of the guilt, and defiance of the consequences; and that is, as I believe, the distinction here intended: and the one the Psalmist called his secret faults, the other his presumptuous sins. Upon the whole, therefore, I conclude, that the secret sins against which the Psalmist prayed, were sins secret to himself.

But here, therefore, comes the principal question — How there *can* be any sins of this sort? how that can be a sin, which is neither observed, nor known to be so by the person who commits it? And then there comes also a second consideration, which is; if there be such, what ought to be done with respect to them? Now, as well upon the authority of the text, as upon what is the real case with human nature, when that case is rightly under-

stood, I contend, first, that there are many violations of God's laws, which the men who are guilty of them, are not sensible of at the time: and yet, secondly, such, as that their want of being sensible of them, does not excuse, or make them cease to be sins. All this, in truth, is no other than the regular effect of sinful habits. Such is the power of custom over our consciences, that there is, perhaps, hardly any bad action which a man is capable of committing, that he may not commit so often, as to become unconscious of its guilt, as much as of the most indifferent thing which he does. If some very great and atrocious crimes may be thought exceptions to this observation, and that no habit or custom can by any possibility reconcile them to the human conscience; it is only because they are such as cannot, from their very nature, be repeated so often by the same person, as to become familiar and habitual: if they could, the consequence would be the same; they would be no more thought of by the sinner himself, than other habitual sins are. But great outrageous crimes, against life, for

instance, and property, and public safety, may be laid out of the question, as not falling, I trust and believe, within the case of any one who hears me; and as in no case whatever capable of being so common, as to be fair experiments of the strength of our observation. These are not what compose our account with God. A man may be (as indeed most men are) quite free from the crimes of murder, robbery, and the like, and yet be *far* from the kingdom of God. I fear it may be said of most of us, that the class of sins which compose our account with God, are habitual sins; habitual *omissions*, and habitual *commissions*. Now it is true of both these, that we may have continued in them so long, they may have become so familiar to us by repetition, that we think nothing at all of them. We may neglect any duty, till we forget that it is one: we may neglect our prayers; we may neglect our devotion; we may neglect every duty towards God, till we become so unaccustomed and unused to them, as to be insensible that we are incurring any omission, or contracting, from that omission, any guilt which

can hurt; and yet we may be, in truth, all the while "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath." How many thousands, for instance, by omitting to attend the sacrament, have come not to know, that it forms any part of Christian obligation: and long disuse and discontinuance would have the same effect upon any other duty, however plain might be the proof of it, when the matter came to be considered.

It is not less so with sins of commission. Serious minds are shocked with observing with what complete unconcern and indifference many forbidden things are practised. The persons who are guilty of them, do not, by any mark or symptom whatever, appear to feel the smallest rebuke of conscience, or to have the least sense of either guilt, or danger, or shame, in what they do: and it not only appears to be so, but it is so. They are, in fact, without any notice, consciousness, or compunction upon the subject. These sins, therefore, if they be such, are secret sins to them. But are they not therefore sins? That becomes the next great question. We must allow, because fact

proves it, that habit and custom can destroy the sense and perception of sin. Does the act then, in that person, cease to be any longer a sin? This must be asserted by those who argue, that nothing can be a sin but what is known and understood, and also felt and perceived, to be so, by the sinner himself at the time; and who, consequently, deny that there are any secret sins, in our sense of that expression. Now mark the consequences which would follow from such an opinion. It is then the timorous *beginner* in wicked courses who alone is to be brought to account. Can such a doctrine be maintained? Sinners are called upon by preachers of the Gospel, and over and over again called upon, to compare themselves with themselves; themselves at one time with themselves at another; their former selves, when they first entered upon sinful allowances, and their present selves, since they have been confirmed in them. With what fear, and scruple, and reluctance, what sense and acknowledgment of wrong, what apprehension of danger, against what remonstrance of reason, and with what opposition

and violence to their religious principle, they first gave way to temptation! With what ease, if ease it may be called, at least with what hardness and unconcern, they now continue in practices which they once dreaded! in a word, what a change, as to the particular article in question at least, has taken place in their moral sentiments! Yet, notwithstanding this change in *them*, the reason, which made what they are doing a sin, remains the same that it was at first: at first they saw great force and strength in that reason; at present they see none; but, in truth it is all the while the same. Unless, therefore, we will choose to say, that a man has only to harden himself in his sins (which thing perseverance will always do for him), and that with the sense he takes away the guilt of them, and that the only sinner is the conscious, trembling, affrightened, reluctant sinner; that the confirmed sinner is not a sinner at all; unless we will advance this, which affronts all principles of justice and sense, we must confess, that secret sins are both possible and frequent things; that with the habitual sinner, and

with every man, in so far as he is, and in that article in which he is, an habitual sinner, this is almost sure to be the case.

What, then, are the reflections suitable to such a case? First, to join most sincerely with the Psalmist in his prayer to God, "O cleanse thou me from my secret faults." Secondly, to see, in this consideration, the exceedingly great danger of evil habits of all kinds. It is a dreadful thing to commit sins without knowing it, and yet to have those sins to answer for. That is dreadful: and yet it is no other than the just consequences and effect of sinful habits. They destroy in us the perception of guilt; that experience proves. They do not destroy the guilt itself; that no man can argue, because it leads to injustice and absurdity.

How well does the Scripture express the state of an habitual sinner, when it calls him "*dead* in trespasses and sins!" His conscience is dead: that, which ought to be the living, actuating, governing principle of the whole man, is dead within

him; is extinguished by the power of sin reigning in his heart. He is incapable of perceiving his sins, whilst he commits them with greediness. It is evident that a vast alteration must take place in such a man, before he be brought into the way of salvation. It is a great change from innocence to guilt, when a man falls from a life of virtue to a life of sin. But the recovery from it is much greater; because the very secrecy of our sins to ourselves, the unconsciousness of them, which practice and custom, and repetition and habit, have produced in us, is an almost unsurmountable hindrance to an effectual reformation.

SERMON XVII.

SERIOUSNESS OF HEART AS TO RELIGION.

LUKE, viii. 15.

But that on the good ground are they, who in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

IT may be true, that a right religious principle produces corresponding external actions, and yet it may not be true, that external actions are what we should always, or entirely, or principally, look to for the purpose of estimating our religious character; or from whence alone we should draw our assurance and evidence of being in the right way.

External actions must depend upon ability, and must wait for opportunity. From a change in the heart, a visible outward change will ensue; from an amendment of disposition an amended conduct will follow; but it may neither be so soon, nor so evident, nor to such a degree, as we may at first sight expect, inasmuch as it will be regulated by occasions and by ability. I do not mean to say (for I do not believe it to be so), that there is any person so forlorn and destitute, as to have no good in his power; expensive kindnesses may not; but there is much kindness, which is not expensive: a kindness of temper; a readiness to oblige; a willingness to assist; a constant inclination to promote the comfort and satisfaction of all who are about us, of all with whom we have concern or connection, of all with whom we associate or converse.

There is also a concern for the virtue of those, over whom, or with whom, we can have any sort of influence, which is a natural concomitant of a radical concern for virtue in ourselves.

But above all, it is undoubtedly in every person's power, whether poor or rich, weak or strong, ill or well endowed by nature or education, it is, I say, in every person's power to avoid sin; if he can do little good, to take care that he do no ill.

Although, therefore, there be no person in the world so circumstanced, but who both can, and will testify his inward principle by his outward behaviour, in one shape or other; yet, on account of the very great difference of those circumstances in which men are placed, and to which their outward exertions are subjected, outward behaviour is not always a just measure of inward principle.

But there is a second case, and that but too common, in which outward behaviour is no measure of religious principle at all; and that is, when it springs from other and different motives and reasons, from those which religion presents. A very bad man may be externally good: a man completely irreligious at the heart may, for the sake of character, for the advantage of having a

good character, for the sake of decency, for the sake of being trusted and respected, and well spoken of, from a love of praise and commendation, from a view of carrying his schemes and designs in the world, or of raising himself by strength of character, or at least from a fear lest a tainted character should be an obstacle to his advancement — from these, and a thousand such sort of considerations, which might be reckoned up; and with which, it is evident, that religion hath no concern or connection whatever, men may be both active, and forward, and liberal in doing good, and exceedingly cautious of giving offence by doing evil; and this may be either wholly, or in part, the case with ourselves.

In judging therefore, and examining ourselves, with a view of knowing the real condition of our souls, the real state and the truth of our spiritual situation in respect to God, and in respect to salvation, it is neither enough, nor is it safe, to look only to our external conduct.

I do not speak in any manner of judg-

ing of other men: if that were necessary at all, which, with a view to religion, it never is, different rules must be laid down for it. I now only speak of that which is necessary, and most absolutely so, in judging rightly of ourselves. To our hearts, therefore, we must look for the marks and tokens of salvation, for the evidence of being in the right way. "That on the good ground are they, who in an honest and good heart bring forth fruit with patience."

One of these marks, and that no slight one, is seriousness at the heart. I can have no hope at all of a man, who does not find himself serious in religious matters, serious at the heart. If the judgment of Almighty God at the last day; if the difference between being saved and being lost; being accepted in the beloved, and being cast forth into outer darkness; being bid by a tremendous word either to enter into the joy of our Father, or to go into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for all who have served him and not God; if these things do not

make us serious, then it is most certain either that we do not believe them, or that we have not yet thought of them at all, or that we have positively broken off thinking of them, have turned away from the subject, have refused to let it enter, have shut our minds against it, or, lastly, that such a levity of mind is our character, as nothing whatever can make any serious impression upon. In any of these cases our condition is deplorable; we cannot look for salvation from Christ's religion under any of them. Do we want seriousness concerning religion, because we do not believe in it? we cannot expect salvation from a religion which we reject. What the root of unbelief in us may be, how far voluntary and avoidable, how far involuntary and unavoidable, God knows, and God only knows: and, therefore, he will in his mercy treat us as he thinketh fit; but we have not the religion to rely upon, to found our hopes upon; we cannot, as I say again, expect salvation from a religion which we reject.

If the second case be ours, namely,

that we have not yet thought of these things, and *therefore* it is, that we are not serious about them, it is high time with every one that he do think of them. These great events are not at a distance from us; they approach to every one of us with the end of our lives; they are the same to all intents and purposes, as if they took place at our deaths. It is ordained for men once to die, and after that judgment. Wherefore it is folly in any man or woman whatever, in any thing above a child, to say they have not thought of religion: it is worse than folly, it is high presumption. How know they that they will be permitted to think of it at all? It is an answer one sometimes receives, but it is a foolish answer. Religion can do no good till it sinks into the thoughts. Commune with thyself and be still. Can any health, or strength, or youth, any vivacity of spirits, any crowd or hurry of business, much less any course of pleasures, be an excuse for not thinking about religion? Is it of importance only to the old and infirm, and dying, to be saved? is it not of the same importance

to the young and strong? can they be saved without religion? or can religion save them without thinking about it?

If, thirdly, such a levity of mind be our character, as nothing can make an impression upon, this levity must be cured, before ever we can draw near unto God. Surely human life wants not materials and occasions for the remedying of this great infirmity. Have we met with no troubles to bring us to ourselves? no disasters in our affairs? no losses in our families? no strokes of misfortune or affliction? no visitations in our health? no warnings in our constitution? If none of these things have befallen us, and it is for that reason that we continue to want seriousness and solidity of character, then it shows how necessary these things are for our real interest and for our real happiness: we are examples how little mankind can do without them; and that a state of unclouded pleasure and prosperity is, of all others, the most unfit for man. It generates the precise evil we complain of, a giddiness and levity of temper upon which religion can-

not act. It indisposes a man for weighty and momentous concerns of any kind; but it most fatally disqualifies him for the concerns of religion. That is its worst consequence, though others may be bad. I believe, therefore, first, that there is such a thing as a levity of thought and character, upon which religion has no effect. I believe, secondly, that this is greatly cherished by health and pleasures, and prosperity, and gay society. I believe thirdly, that, whenever this is the case, these things, which are accounted such blessings, which men covet and envy, are in truth, deep and heavy calamities. For, lastly, I believe, that this levity must be changed into seriousness before the mind infected with it can come unto God; and most assuredly true it is, that we cannot come to happiness in the next world, unless we come to God in this.

I repeat again, therefore, that we must look to our hearts for our character: not simply or solely to our actions, which may be and will be of a mixed nature, but to the internal state of our disposition. That is the place in which religion dwells; in

that it consists. And I also repeat that one of these internal marks of a right disposition, of an honest and good heart, as relative to religion, is seriousness. There can be no true religion without it. And further, a mark and test of a growing religion, is a growing seriousness; so that when, instead of seeing these things at a distance, we begin to look *near* upon them; when, from faint, they become distinct; when, instead of now and then perceiving a slight sense of these matters, a hasty passage of them, as it were, through the thoughts, they begin to rest and settle there: in a word, when we become *serious* about religion, then, and not till then, may we hope that things are going on right within us; that the soil is prepared; the seed sown. Its future growth and maturity and fruit may not yet be known, but the seed is sown in the heart: and in a serious heart it will not be sown in vain; in a heart not yet become serious, it may.

Religious seriousness is not churlishness, is not severity, is not gloominess, is not

melancholy: but it is nevertheless a *disposition* of mind, and, like every disposition, it will show itself one way or other. It will, in the first place, neither invite, nor entertain, nor encourage any thing which has a tendency to turn religion into ridicule. It is not in the nature of things, that a serious mind should find delight or amusement in so doing; it is not in the nature of things, that it should not feel an inward pain and reluctance whenever it is done. Therefore, if we are capable of being pleased with hearing religion treated, or talked of with levity; made in any manner whatever, an object of sport and jesting; if we are capable of making it so ourselves, or joining with others, as in a diversion, in so doing; nay, if we do not feel ourselves at the heart grieved and offended, whenever it is our lot to be present at such sort of conversation and discourse: then is the inference, as to ourselves, infallible, that we are not yet serious in our religion; and then it will be for us to remember, that seriousness is one of those marks by which we may fairly judge of the state of our mind and disposition,

as to religion: and that the state of our mind and disposition is the very thing to be consulted, to be known, to be examined and searched into, for the purpose of ascertaining, whether we are in a right and safe way, or not. Words and actions are to be judged of, with a reference to the disposition which they indicate. There may be a language, there may be expressions, there may be behaviour, of no very great consequence in itself and considered in itself, but of very great consequence indeed, when considered as indicating a disposition and state of mind. If it show, with respect to religion, *that* to be wanting within which ought to be there, namely, a deep and fixed sense of our personal and individual concern in religion, of its importance above all other important things: then it shows, that there is yet a deficiency in our hearts; which, without delay, must be supplied by closer meditation upon the subject than we have hitherto used; and, above all, by earnest and unceasing prayer for such a portion and measure of spiritual influence shed upon our hearts, as may

cure and remedy that heedlessness and coldness, and deadness, and unconcern, which are fatal, and under which, we have so much reason to know, that we as yet unhappily labour.

SERMON XVIII.

THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

(PART I.)

HEBREWS, ix. 26.

Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

THE salvation of mankind, and most particularly in so far as the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are concerned in it, and whereby he comes to be called our Saviour and our Redeemer, ever has been, and ever must be, a most interesting subject to all serious minds.

Now there is one thing in which there is no division or difference of opinion at all; which is, that the death of Jesus Christ

is spoken of, in reference to human salvation, in terms and in a manner, in which the death of no person whatever is spoken of besides. Others have died martyrs, as well as our Lord. Others have suffered in a righteous cause, as well as he; but that is said of him, and of his death and sufferings, which is not said of any one else. An efficacy and a concern are ascribed to them, in the business of human salvation, which are not ascribed to any other.

What may be called the first Gospel declaration upon this subject, is the exclamation of John the Baptist, when he saw Jesus coming unto him: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." I think it plain, that when John called our Lord the Lamb of God, he spoke with a relation to his being sacrificed, and to the effect of that sacrifice upon the pardon of human sin: and this, you will observe, was said of him, even before he entered upon his office. If any doubt could be made of the meaning of the Baptist's expression, it is settled by other places, in which the like allusion to

a Lamb is adopted; and where the allusion is specifically applied to his death, considered as a sacrifice.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the following words of Isaiah are, by Philip the evangelist, distinctly applied to our Lord, and to our Lord's death. "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a Lamb dumb before his shearers: so opened he not his mouth; in his humiliation his judgment was taken away, and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth:" therefore it was to his death, you see, that the description relates. Now, I say, that this is applied to Christ most distinctly; for the pious eunuch, who was reading the passage in his chariot, was at a loss to know to whom it should be applied. "I pray thee," saith he to Philip, "of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself or of some other man?" And Philip, you read, taught him that it was spoken of Christ. And I say, secondly, that this particular part and expression of the prophecy being applied to Christ's death, carries the whole prophecy to the same subject: for it

is undoubtedly one entire prophecy: therefore the other expressions, which are still stronger, are applicable as well as this. "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed: the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." There is a strong and very apposite text of St. Peter's, in which the application of the term "Lamb" to our Lord, and the sense, in which it is applied, can admit of no question at all. It is in the 1st chapter of the 1st epistle, the 18th and 19th verses: "Forasmuch as ye know, that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." All the use I make of these passages is to show, that the prophet Isaiah, six hundred years before his birth; St. John the Baptist, upon the commencement of his ministry; St. Peter, his friend, companion, and apostle, after the transaction was over, speak of Christ's death under the figure of a Lamb being sacrificed: that is, as having the effect of a

sacrifice, the effect in kind, though infinitely higher in degree, upon the pardon of sins, and the procurement of salvation; and that this is spoken of the death of no other person whatever.

Other plain and distinct passages, declaring the efficacy of Christ's death, are the following: Hebrews, ix. 26. "Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many: and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." And in the xth chap. 12th ver. "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down at the right hand of God, for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." I observe again, that nothing of this sort is said of the death of any other person; no such efficacy is imputed to any other martyrdom. So likewise, in the following text, from the Epistle to the Romans: "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us; much more then being now justified by his blood we

shall be saved from wrath through him; for if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life." "Reconciled to God by the death of his Son;" therefore that death had an efficacy in our reconciliation; but reconciliation is preparatory to salvation. The same thing is said by the same apostle in his Epistle to the Colossians: "He has reconciled us to his Father in his cross, and in the body of his flesh through death." What is said of reconciliation in these texts, it is said in other texts of sanctification, which also is preparatory to salvation. Thus, Hebrews, x. 10. "we are sanctified:" how? namely, "by the offering of the body of Christ once for all:" so again in the same epistle, "the blood of Jesus is called the blood of the covenant by which we are sanctified."

In these and many more passages, that lie spread in different parts of the New Testament, it appears to be asserted, that the death of Christ had an efficacy in the procurement of human salvation. Now

these expressions mean something: mean something substantial; they are used concerning no other person, nor the death of any other person whatever. Therefore Christ's death was something more than a confirmation of his preaching; something more than a pattern of a holy and patient, and perhaps voluntary, martyrdom; something more than necessarily antecedent to his resurrection, by which he gave a grand and clear proof of human resurrection. Christ's death was all these, but it was something more; because none of these ends, nor all of them, satisfy the text you have heard; come up to the assertions and declarations which are delivered concerning it.

Now allowing the subject to stop here; allowing that we know nothing, nor can know any thing concerning it, but what is written; and that nothing more is written, than that the death of Christ had a real and essential effect upon human salvation: we have certainly before us a doctrine of a very peculiar, perhaps I may say, of a very unexpected kind, in some measure

hidden in the counsels of the divine nature, but still so far revealed to us, as to excite two great religious sentiments, admiration and gratitude.

That a person of a nature different from all other men; nay superior, for so he is distinctly described to be, to all created beings, whether men or angels: united with the Deity as no other person is united; that such a person should come down from heaven, and suffer upon earth the pains of an excruciating death, and that these his submissions and sufferings should avail and produce a great effect in the procurement of the future salvation of mankind, cannot but excite wonder. But it is by no means improbable on that account; on the contrary it might be reasonably supposed beforehand, that if any thing was disclosed to us touching a future life, and touching the dispensations of God to men, it would be something of a nature to excite admiration. In the world in which we live, we may be said to have some knowledge of its laws and constitution, and nature: we have long experienced them: as also of

the beings with whom we converse, or amongst whom we are conversant, we may be said to understand something: at least they are familiar to us: we are not surprised with appearances which every day occur. But of the world and the life to which we are destined, and of the beings amongst whom we may be brought, the case is altogether different. Here is no experience to explain things; no use or familiarity to take off surprise, to reconcile us to difficulties, to assist our apprehension. In the new order of things, according to the new laws of nature, every thing will be suitable; suitable to the beings who are to occupy the future world: but that suitableness cannot, as it seems to me, be possibly perceived by us, until we are acquainted with that order and with those beings. So that it arises, as it were, from the necessity of things, that what is told us by a divine messenger of heavenly affairs, of affairs purely spiritual, that is, relating purely to another world, must be so comprehended by us, as to excite admiration.

But secondly; partially as we may, or perhaps must, comprehend this subject, in common with all subjects which relate strictly and solely to the nature of our future life, we may comprehend it quite sufficiently for one purpose; and that is gratitude. It was only for a moral purpose that the thing was revealed at all; and that purpose is a sense of gratitude and obligation. This was the use which the apostles of our Lord, who knew the most, made of their knowledge. This was the turn they gave to their meditations upon the subject; the impression it left upon their hearts. That a great and happy Being should voluntarily enter the world in a mean and low condition, and humble himself to a death upon the cross, that is to be executed as a malefactor, in order, by whatever means it was done, to promote the attainment of salvation to mankind, and to each and every one of themselves, was a theme they dwelt upon with feelings of the warmest thankfulness; because they were feelings proportioned to the magnitude of the benefit. Earthly benefits are nothing compared with those

which are heavenly. That *they* felt from the bottom of their souls. That, in my opinion, we do not feel as we ought. But feeling this, they never ceased to testify, to acknowledge, to express the deepest obligation, the most devout consciousness of that obligation, to their Lord and Master; to him, whom, for what he had done and suffered, they regarded as the finisher of their faith, and the author of their salvation.

SERMON XIX.

ALL STAND IN NEED OF A REDEEMER.

(PART II.)

HEBREWS, ix. 26.

Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

IN former discourses upon this text I have shown first, that the Scriptures expressly state the death of Jesus Christ as having an efficacy in the procurement of human salvation, which is not attributed to the death or sufferings of any other person, however patiently undergone, or undeservedly inflicted; and secondly*, that this efficacy is quite consistent with our obligation to obedience: that good works still remain the condition of salvation,

* This second discourse has not been met with.

though not the cause; the cause being the mercy of Almighty God through Jesus Christ. There is no man living, perhaps, who has considered seriously the state of his soul, to whom this is not a consoling doctrine, and a grateful truth. But there are some situations of mind which dispose us to feel the weight and importance of this doctrine more than others. These situations I will endeavour to describe; and, in doing so, to point out how much more satisfactory it is to have a Saviour and Redeemer, and the mercies of our Creator excited toward us, and communicated to us by and through that Saviour and Redeemer, to confide in and rely upon, than any grounds of merit in ourselves.

First, then, souls which are really labouring and endeavouring after salvation, and with sincerity — such souls are every hour made sensible, deeply sensible of the deficiency and imperfection of their endeavours. Had they no ground, therefore, for hope, but *merit*, that is to say, could they look for nothing more than what they should strictly *deserve*, their prospect would

be very uncomfortable. I see not how they could look for *heaven* at all. They may form a conception of the virtue and obedience which might seem to be entitled to a high reward; but when they come to review their own performances, and to compare them with that conception; when they see how short they have proved of what they ought to have been, and of what they might have been, how weak and broken were their best offices; they will be the first to confess, that it is infinitely for their comfort that they have some other resource than their own righteousness. One infallible effect of sincerity in our endeavours is to beget in us a knowledge of our imperfections. The careless, the heedless, the thoughtless, the nominal Christian, feels no want of a Saviour, an intercessor, a mediator, because he feels not his own defects. Try in earnest to perform the duties of religion, and you will soon learn how incomplete your best performances are. I can hardly mention a branch of our duty, which is not liable to be both impure in the motive, and imperfect in the execution; or a branch of our duty in which

our endeavours can found their hopes of acceptance upon any thing but extended mercy, and the efficacy of those means and causes which have procured it to be so extended.

In the first place, is not this the case with our acts of piety and devotion? We may admit, that pure and perfect piety has a natural title to reward at the hand of God. But is ours ever such? To be pure in its motive, it ought to proceed from a sense of God Almighty's goodness towards us, and from no other source, or cause, or motive whatsoever. Whereas even pious, comparatively pious men, will acknowledge, that authority, custom, decency, imitation, have a share in most of their religious exercises, and that they cannot warrant any of their devotions to be entirely independent of these causes. I would not speak disparagingly of the considerations here recited. They are oftentimes necessary inducements, and they may be means of bringing us to better; but still it is true, that devotion is not pure in its origin, unless it flow from a

sense of God Almighty's goodness, unmixed with any other reason. But if our worship of God be defective in its principle, and often debased by the mixture of impure motives, it is still more deficient, when we come to regard it in its performances. Our devotions are broken and interrupted, or they are cold and languid. Worldly thoughts intrude themselves upon them. Our worldly heart is tied down to the earth. Our devotions are unworthy of God. We lift not up our hearts unto him. Our treasure is upon earth, and our hearts are with our treasure. That heavenly-mindedness which ought to be inseparable from religious exercises does not accompany ours; at least not constantly. I speak not now of the hypocrite in religion, of him who only makes a show of it. His case comes not within our present consideration. I speak of those who are sincere men. These feel the imperfection of their services, and will acknowledge that I have not stated it more strongly than what is true. Imperfection cleaves to every part of it. Our thankfulness is never what it ought to be, or any thing

like it: and it is only when we have some particular reason for being pleased that we are thankful at all. Formality is apt continually to steal upon us in our worship: more especially in our publick worship: and formality takes away the immediate consciousness of what we are doing: which consciousness is the very life of devotion; all that we do without it being a dead ceremony.

No man reviews his services towards God, his religious services, but he perceives in them much to be forgiven, much to be excused; great unworthiness as respecting the object of all worship; much deficiency and imperfection to be passed over, before our service can be deemed in its nature an acceptable service. That such services therefore, should, in fact, be allowed and accepted, and that no less an end and purpose than the attainment of heaven, is an act of abounding grace and goodness in Him who accepts them: and we are taught in Scripture, that this so much wanted grace and goodness abounds towards us, through Jesus Christ; and

particularly through his sufferings and his death.

But to pass from our acts of worship, which form a particular part only of our duty to God; to pass from these to our general duty, what, let us ask, is that duty? What is our duty towards God? No other, our Saviour himself tells us, than "to love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind," Luke, x. 27. Are we conscious of such love, to such a degree? If we are not, then, in a most fundamental duty, we fail of being what we ought to be. Here, then, as before, is a call for pardoning mercy on the part of God; which mercy is extended to us by the intervention of Jesus Christ: at least so the Scriptures represent it.

In our duties towards one another, it may be said, that our performances are more adequate to our obligation, than in our duties to God; that the subjects of them lie more level with our capacity; and there may be truth in this observation.

But still I am afraid, that both in principle and execution our performances are not only defective, but defective in a degree which we are not sufficiently aware of. The rule laid down for us is this, "to love our neighbour *as* ourselves." Which rule, in fact, enjoins, that our benevolence be as strong as our self-interest; that we be as anxious to do good, as quick to discover, as eager to embrace, every opportunity of doing it, and as active, and resolute, and persevering in our endeavours to do it, as we are anxious for ourselves, and active in the pursuit of our own interest. Now is this the case with us? Wherein it is not, we fall below our rule. In the apostles of Jesus Christ, to whom this rule was given from his own mouth, you may read how it operated: and their example proves, what some deny, the possibility of the thing; namely, of benevolence being as strong a motive as self-interest. They firmly believed, that to bring men to the knowledge of Christ's religion was the greatest possible good that could be done unto them; was the highest act of benevolence they could exercise. And accordingly, they set about

this work, and carried it on, with as much energy, as much ardour, as much perseverance, through as great toils and labours, as many sufferings and difficulties, as any person ever pursued a scheme for their own interest, or for the making of a fortune. They could not possibly have done more for their own sakes than what they did for the sake of others. They literally loved their neighbours as themselves. Some have followed their example in this; and some have, in zeal and energy, followed their example in other methods of doing good. For I do not mean to say, that the particular method of usefulness, which the office of the apostles cast upon them, is the only method, or that it is a method even competent to many. Doing good, without any selfish worldly motive for doing it, is the grand thing: the mode must be regulated by opportunity and occasion. To which may be added, that in those, whose power of doing good, according to any mode, is small, the principle of benevolence will at least restrain them from doing harm. If the principle be subsisting in their hearts, it will have this operation at least.

I ask therefore again, as I asked before, are we as solicitous to seize opportunities, to look out for and embrace occasions of doing good, as we are certainly solicitous to lay hold of opportunities of making advantage to ourselves, and to embrace all occasions of profit and self-interest? Nay, is benevolence strong enough to hold our hand, when stretched out for mischief? is it always sufficient to make us consider what misery we are producing, whilst we are compassing a selfish end, or gratifying a lawless passion of our own? Do the two principles of benevolence and self-interest possess any degree of parallelism and equality in our hearts, and in our conduct? If they do, then so far we come up to our rule. Wherein they do not, as I said before, we fall below it.

When not only the generality of mankind, but even those who are endeavouring to do their duty, apply this standard to themselves, they are made to learn the humiliating lesson of their own deficiency. That such our deficiency should be overlooked, so as not to become the loss to us of

happiness after death; that our poor, weak, humble endeavours to comply with our Saviour's rule should be received and not rejected; I say, if we hope for this, we must hope for it, not on the ground of congruity or desert, which it will not bear, but from the extreme benignity of a merciful God; and the availing mediation of a Redeemer. You will observe that I am still, and have been all along, speaking of sincere men, of those who are in earnest in their duty, and in religion: and I say, upon the strength of what has been alleged, that even these persons, when they read in Scripture of the riches of the goodness of God, of the powerful efficacy of the death of Christ, of his mediation and continual intercession, know and feel in their hearts that they stand in need of them all.

In that remaining class of duties, which are called duties to ourselves, the observation we have made upon the deficiency of our endeavours applies with equal or with greater force. More is here wanted than the mere command of our actions. The heart itself is to be regulated; the hardest

thing in this world to manage. The affections and passions are to be kept in order: constant evil propensities are to be constantly opposed. I apprehend, that every sincere man is conscious how unable he is to fulfil this part of his duty, even to his own satisfaction: and if our conscience accuse us, "God is greater than our conscience, and knoweth all things." If we see our sad failings, He must.

God forbid that any thing I say, either upon this, or the other branches of our duty should damp our endeavours. Let them be as vigorous, and as steadfast, as they can. They will be so if we are sincere; and without sincerity there is no hope; none whatever. But there will always be left enough, infinitely more than enough, to humble self-sufficiency.

Contemplate, then, what is placed before us: heaven. Understand what heaven is: a state of happiness after death, exceeding what, without experience, it is possible for us to conceive, and unlimited in duration. This is a reward infinitely beyond any thing we can pretend to, as of

right, as merited, as due. Some distinction between us and others, between the comparatively good and the bad, might be expected: but, on these grounds, not such a reward as this, even were our services, I mean the service of sincere men, perfect. But such services as ours, in truth, are, such services as, in fact, we perform, so poor, so deficient, so broken, so mixed with alloy, so imperfect both in principle and execution, what have they to look for upon their own foundation? When, therefore, the Scriptures speak to us of a Redeemer, a mediator, an intercessor for us; when they display and magnify the exceedingly great mercies of God, as set forth in the salvation of man, according to any mode whatever which he might be pleased to appoint; and therefore in that mode which the Gospel holds forth; they teach us no other doctrine than that to which the actual deficiencies of our duty, and a just consciousness and acknowledgement of these deficiencies, must naturally carry our own minds. What we feel in ourselves corresponds with what we read in Scripture.

SERMON XX.

THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST CONSISTENT WITH THE NECESSITY OF A GOOD LIFE; THE ONE BEING THE CAUSE, THE OTHER THE CONDITION, OF SALVATION.

ROMANS, vi. 1.

What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.

THE same Scriptures, which represent the death of Christ, as having that which belongs to the death of no other person, namely, an efficacy in procuring the salvation of man, are also constant and uniform in representing the necessity of our own endeavours, of our own good works, for the same purpose. They go further.

They foresaw that in stating, and still more when they went about to extol and magnify the death of Christ, as instrumental to salvation, they were laying a foundation for the opinion, that men's own works, their own virtue, their personal endeavours, were superseded and dispensed with. In proportion as the sacrifice of the death of Christ was effectual, in the same proportion were these less necessary; if the death of Christ was sufficient, if redemption was complete, then were these not necessary at all. They foresaw that some would draw this consequence from their doctrine, and they provided against it.

It is observable, that the same consequence might be deduced from the goodness of God in any way of representing it: not only in the particular and peculiar way, in which it is represented in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, but in any other way. St. Paul, for one was sensible of this: and, therefore, when he speaks of the goodness of God even in general terms, he takes care to point out the only true turn which ought to be given to it in our thoughts —

"Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance, and long suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" as if he had said, — With thee, I perceive, that the consideration of the goodness of God leads to the allowing of thyself in sin; this is not to know what that consideration ought in truth to lead to: it ought to lead thee to repentance, and to no other conclusion.

Again; when the apostle had been speaking of the righteousness of God displayed by the wickedness of man: he was not unaware of the misconstruction to which this representation was liable, and which it had, in fact, experienced; which misconstruction he states thus, — "We be slanderously reported, and some affirm that we say, let us do evil that good may come." This insinuation, however, he regards as nothing less than an unfair and wilful perversion of his words, and of the words of other Christian teachers; therefore he says concerning those who did thus pervert them, "their condemnation is just;" they will be justly condemned for

thus abusing the doctrine, which we teach. The passage, however, clearly shows, that the application of their expressions to the encouragement of licentiousness of life, was an application contrary to their intention; and in fact, a perversion of their words.

In like manner in the same chapter our apostle had no sooner laid down the doctrine, "that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law," than he checks himself as it were, by subjoining this proviso: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." Whatever he meant by his assertion concerning faith, he takes care to let them know he did not mean this, "to make void the law," or to dispense with obedience.

But the clearest text to our purpose is that undoubtedly, which I have prefixed to this discourse. St. Paul, after expatiating largely upon the "grace," that is, the favour, kindness, and mercy of God, the extent, the greatness, the comprehensiveness of that mercy, as manifested in the

Christian dispensation, puts this question to his reader: — "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" which he answers by a strong negative — "God forbid." What the apostle designed in this passage is sufficiently evident. He knew in what manner some might be apt to construe his expressions; and he anticipates their mistake. He is beforehand with them, by protesting against any such use being made of his doctrine: which yet he was aware, might by possibility be made.

By way of showing scripturally the obligation and the necessity of personal endeavours after virtue, all the numerous texts which exhort to virtue, and admonish us against vice, might be quoted; for they are all directly to the purpose; that is, we might quote every page of the New Testament. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." — In both these texts the re-

ward attends the *doing*; the promise is annexed to works. Again; "To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man *that doeth evil.*" Again; "of the which," namely, certain enumerated vices, "I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they, which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God." These are a few amongst many texts of the same effect, and they are such as can never be got over. Stronger terms cannot be devised than what are here used. Were the purpose therefore, simply to prove from Scripture the necessity of virtue, and the danger of vice, so far as salvation is concerned, these texts are decisive. But when an answer is to be given to those, who so interpret certain passages of the apostolic writings, especially the passages which speak of the efficacy of the death of Christ, or draw such inferences from these passages, as amount to a dispensing with the obligations of virtue:

then the best method of proving, that theirs cannot be a right interpretation, nor theirs just inferences, is, by showing, which fortunately we are able to do, that it is the very interpretation, and these the very inferences which the apostles were themselves aware of, which they provided against, and which they protested against. The four texts, quoted from the apostolic writings in this discourse, were quoted with this view; and they may be considered, I think, as showing the minds of the authors upon the point in question more determinately than any general exhortation to good works, or any general denunciation against sin could do. I assume, therefore, as a proved point, that whatever was said by the apostles concerning the efficacy of the death of Christ, was said by them under an apprehension, that they did not thereby in any manner relax the motives, the obligation, or the necessity of good works. But still there is another important question behind; namely, whether, notwithstanding what the apostles have said, or may have meant to say, there be not in the nature of things, an invincible

inconsistency between the efficacy of the death of Christ, and the necessity of a good life; whether those two propositions can, in fair reasoning stand together; or whether it does not necessarily follow, that if the death of Christ be efficacious, then good works are no longer necessary; and, on the other hand, that, if good works be still necessary, then is the death of Christ not efficacious.

Now to give an account of this question, and of the difficulty which it seems to present, we must bear in mind that in the business of salvation there are naturally and properly two things, *viz.* the cause and the condition; and that these two things are different. We should see better the propriety of this distinction, if we would allow ourselves to consider well *what salvation* is: what the being saved means. It is nothing less than, after this life is ended, being placed in a state of happiness exceedingly great both in degree and duration; a state, concerning which the following things are said; "the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be

compared with the glory that shall be revealed." "God hath in store for us such things as pass man's understanding." So that, you see, it is not simply escaping punishment, simply being excused or forgiven, simply being compensated or repaid for the little good we do, but it is infinitely more. Heaven is infinitely greater, than mere compensation, which natural religion itself might lead us to expect. What do the Scriptures call it? "Glory, honour, immortality, eternal life." "To them that seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." Will any one then contend, that salvation in this sense, and to this extent; that heaven, eternal life, glory, honour, immortality; that a happiness such as that there is no way of describing it, but by saying that it surpasses human comprehension, that it casts the sufferings of this life at such a distance as not to bear any comparison with it: will any one contend, that this is no more than what virtue deserves, what in its own proper nature, and by its own merit, it is entitled to look forward to, and to receive? The greatest virtue that man ever attained

has no such pretensions. The best good action that man ever performed has no claim to this extent, or any thing like it. It is out of all calculation, and comparison, and proportion above, and more than any human works can possibly deserve.

To what then are we to ascribe it, that endeavours after virtue should procure, and that they will, in fact, procure, to those who sincerely exert them, such immense blessings? To what, but to the voluntary bounty of Almighty God, who, in his inexpressible good pleasure, hath appointed it so to be? The benignity of God towards man hath made him this inconceivably advantageous offer. But a most kind offer may still be a conditional offer. And this, though an infinitely gracious and beneficial offer, is still a conditional offer, and the performance of the conditions is as necessary, as if it had been an offer of mere retribution. The kindness, the bounty, the generosity of the offer, do not make it less necessary to perform the conditions, but more so. A conditional offer may be infinitely kind on the part of the benefac-

tor who makes it, may be infinitely beneficial to those to whom it is made. If it be from a prince or governor, may be infinitely gracious and merciful on his part; and yet, being conditional, the condition is as necessary, as if the offer had been no more than that of scanty wages by a hard taskmaster.

In considering this matter *in general*, the whole of it appears to be very plain; yet, when we apply the consideration to religion, there are two mistakes into which we are very liable to fall. The first is, that when we hear so much of the exceedingly great kindness of the offer, we are apt to infer, that the conditions, upon which it was made, will not be exacted. Does that at all follow? Because the offer, even with these conditions, is represented to be the fruit of love and mercy and kindness, and is in truth so, and is most justly so to be accounted, does it follow that the conditions of the offer are not necessary to be performed? This is one error, into which we slide, against which we ought to guard ourselves, most diligently: for it is not simply false in

its principle, but most pernicious in its application; its application always being to countenance us in some sin which we will not relinquish. The second mistake is, that, when we have performed the conditions, or think that we have performed the conditions, or when we endeavour to perform the conditions, upon which the reward is offered, we forthwith attribute our obtaining the reward to this our performance or endeavour, and not to that which is the beginning and foundation and cause of the whole, the true and proper cause, namely, the kindness and bounty of the original offer. This turn of thought, likewise, as well as the former, it is necessary to warn you against. For it has these consequences: it damps our gratitude to God, it takes off our attention from Him.

Some, who allow the necessity of good works to salvation, are not willing that they should be called conditions of salvation. But this, I think, is a distinction too refined for common Christian apprehension. If they be necessary to salvation, they are conditions of salvation, so far as I can see.

It is a question, however, not now before us.

But to return to the immediate subject of our discourse. Our observations have carried us thus far; that in the business of human salvation there are two most momentous considerations, the cause and the conditions, and that these considerations are distinct. I now proceed to say, that there is no inconsistency between the efficacy of the death of Christ and the necessity of a holy life (by which I mean sincere endeavours after holiness); because the first, the death of Christ relates to the cause of salvation; the second, namely, good works, respects the conditions of salvation, and that the cause of salvation is one thing, the conditions another.

The cause of salvation is the free will, the free gift, the love and mercy of God. That alone is the source and fountain and cause of salvation, the origin from which it springs, from which all our hopes of attaining to it are derived. This cause is not in ourselves, nor in any thing we

do, or can do, but in God, in his good will and pleasure. It is, as we have before shown, in the graciousness of the original offer. Therefore, whatever shall have moved and excited and conciliated that good will and pleasure, so as to have procured that offer to be made, or shall have formed any part or portion of the motive from which it was made, may most truly and properly be said to be efficacious in human salvation.

This efficacy is in Scripture attributed to the death of Christ. It is attributed in a variety of ways of expression, but this is the substance of them all. He is "a sacrifice, an offering to God; a propitiation; the precious sacrifice foreordained; the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; the Lamb which taketh away the sin of the world. We are washed in his blood; we are justified by his blood; we are saved from wrath through him; he hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." All these terms, and many more that are used, assert in substance the same thing, namely, the efficacy of the death of Christ in the procuring of

human salvation. To give to these expressions their proper moment and import, it is necessary to reflect, over and over again, and by reflection to impress our minds with a just idea, what and how great a thing salvation is: for it is by means of that idea alone, that we can ever come to be sensible how unspeakably important, how inestimable in value, any efficacy, which operates upon that event, must be to us all. The highest terms in which the Scriptures speak of that efficacy are not too great: cannot be too great; because it respects an interest and an event, so vast, so momentous, as to make all other interests, and all other events, in comparison contemptible.

The sum of our argument is briefly this. There may appear, and to many there has appeared, to be an inconsistency or incompatability between the efficacy of the death of Christ, and the necessity of sincere endeavours after obedience. When the subject is properly examined, there turns out to be no such incompatibility. The graciousness of an offer does not diminish the necessity of the condition. Suppose a prince

to promise to one of his subjects, upon compliance with certain terms, and the performance of certain duties, a reward, in magnitude and value, out of all competition beyond the merit of the compliance, the desert of the performance; to what shall such a subject ascribe the happiness held out to him? He is an ungrateful man if he attribute it to any cause whatever, but to the bounty and goodness of his prince in making him the offer; or if he suffer any consideration, be it what it will, to interfere with, or diminish, his sense of that bounty and goodness. Still it is true, that he will not obtain what is offered, unless he comply with the terms. So far his compliance is a condition of his happiness. But the grand thing is the offer being made at all. That is the ground and origin of the whole. That is the *cause;* and is ascribable to favour, grace, and goodness, on the part of the prince, and to nothing else. It would therefore be the last degree of ingratitude in such a subject, to forget his prince, while he thought of himself; to forget the *cause*, whilst he thought of the condition; to regard every thing promised as merited. The

generosity, the kindness, the voluntariness, the bounty of the original offer, come by this means to be neglected in his mind entirely. This, in my opinion, describes our situation with respect to God. The love, goodness, and grace of God, in making us a tender of salvation, and the effects of the death of Christ, do not diminish the necessity or the obligation of the condition of the tender, which is, sincere endeavours after holiness; nor are, in anywise, inconsistent with such obligation.

SERMON XXI.

PURE RELIGION.

JAMES, i. 27.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

NOTHING can be more useful than summary views of our duty, if they be well drawn and rightly understood. It is a great advantage to have our business laid before us altogether; to see at one comprehensive glance as it were, what we are to do, and what we are not to do. It would be a great ease and satisfaction to both, if it were possible, for a master to give his servant directions for his conduct in a single sentence, which he, the servant, had only to apply and draw out into

practice, as occasions offered themselves, in order to discharge every thing which was required or expected from him. This, which is not practicable in civil life, is in a good degree so in a religious life; because a religious life proceeds more upon principle, leaving the exercise and manifestation of that principle more to the judgment of the individual, than it can be left where, from the nature of the case, one man is to act precisely according to another man's direction.

But then, as I have said, it is essentially necessary, that these summaries be well drawn up, and rightly understood; because if they profess to state the whole of men's duty, yet, in fact, state it partially and imperfectly, all who read them are misled and dangerously misled. In religion, as in other things, we are too apt of ourselves to substitute a part for the whole. Substituting a part for the whole is the grand tendency of human corruption, in matters both of morality and religion; which propensity, therefore, will be encouraged, when that, which professes to

exhibit the whole of religion, does not, in truth, exhibit the whole. What is *there* omitted, we shall omit; glad of the occasion and excuse. What is not set down as our duty, we shall not think ourselves obliged to perform, not caring to increase the weight of our own burthen. This is the case whenever we use summaries of religion, which, in truth, are imperfect or ill-drawn. But there is another case more common, and productive of the same effect, and that is, when we misconstrue these summary accounts of our duty: principally when we conceive of them as intending to express more than they were really intended to express. For then it comes to pass, that, although they be right and perfect as to what they were intended for, yet they are wrong and imperfect as to what we construe and conceive them for. This observation is particularly applicable to the text. St. James is here describing religion not in its principle, but in its effects: and these *effects* are truly and justly and fully displayed. They are by the apostle made to consist of two large articles; in succouring the distress of others,

and maintaining our own innocency. And these two articles do comprehend the whole of the effects of true religion; which were exactly what the apostle meant to describe. Had St. James intended to have set forth the motives and principles of religion, as they ought to subsist in the heart of a Christian, I doubt not but he would have mentioned love to God, and faith in Jesus Christ; for from these must spring every thing good and acceptable in our actions. In natural objects it is one thing to describe the root of a plant, and another its fruits and flowers; and if we think a writer is describing the roots and fibres, when, in truth, he is describing the fruit or flowers, we shall mistake his meaning, and our mistake must produce great confusion. So in spiritual affairs it is one thing to set before us the principle of religion, and another the effects of it. These are not to be confounded. And if we apply a description to one which was intended for the other, we deal unfairly by the writer of the description, and erroneously by ourselves. Therefore, first, let no one suppose the love of God, the think-

ing of him, the being grateful to him, the fearing to disobey him, not to be necessary parts of true religion, because they are not mentioned in St. James's account of true religion. The answer is, that these compose the principles of true religion; St. James's account relates to the effects. In like manner concerning faith in Jesus Christ. St. James has recorded his opinion upon that subject. His doctrine is, that the tree which bears no fruit cannot be sound at the root; that the faith which is unproductive is not the right faith: but then this is allowing (and not denying) that a right faith is the source and spring of true virtue: and had our apostle been asked to state the principle of religion, I am persuaded he would have referred us to a true faith. But that was not the inquiry: on the contrary having marked strongly the futility of a faith, which produced no good effects upon life and action, he proceeds in the text to tell us what the effects are which it ought to produce; and these he disposes into two comprehensive classes, (but still meaning to describe the effects of religion, and not its root or prin-

ciple,) positive virtue and personal innocence.

Now, I say, that for the purpose for which it was intended, the account given by St. James is full and complete. And it carries with it this peculiar advantage, that it very specially guards against an error natural, I believe, and common in all ages of the world; which is, the making beneficence an apology for licentiousness; the thinking that doing good occasionally may excuse us from strictness in regulating our passions and desires. The text expressly cuts up this excuse, because it expressly asserts both things to be necessary to compose true religion. Where two things are necessary, one cannot excuse the want of the other. Now, what does the text teach? it teaches us what pure and undefiled religion is in its effects and in its practice: and what is it? "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Not simply to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction: that is not all; that is not suf-

ficient; but likewise "to keep himself unspotted from the world."

To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, is describing a class, or species, or kind of virtue, by singling out one eminent example of it. I consider the apostle as meaning to represent the value, and to enforce the obligation of active charity, of positive beneficence, and that he has done it by mentioning a particular instance. A stronger or properer instance could not have been selected: but still it is to be regarded as an instance, not as exclusive of other and similar instances, but as a specimen of these exertions. The case before us, as an instance, is heightened by every circumstance which could give to it weight and priority. The apostle exhibits the most forlorn and destitute of the human species, suffering under the severest of human losses; helpless children deprived of a parent, a wife bereaved of her husband, both sunk in affliction, under the sharpest anguish of their misfortunes. To visit, by which is meant to console, to

comfort, to succour, to relieve, to assist such as these, is undoubtedly a high exercise of religion and benevolence, and well selected: but still it is to be regarded as an example, and the whole class of beneficent virtues as intended to be included. This is not only a just and fair, but a necessary construction: because, although the exercise of beneficence be a duty upon every man, yet the kind, the examples of it, must be guided in a great degree by each man's faculties, opportunities, and by the occasions which present themselves. If such an occasion, as that which the text describes, present itself, it cannot be overlooked without an abandonment of religion: but if other and different occasions of doing good present themselves, they also, according to the spirit of our apostle's declaration, must be attended to, or we are wanting in the fruit of the same faith.

The second principal expression of the text, "to keep himself unspotted from the world," signifies the being clean and clear from the licentious practices to which the world is addicted. So that "pure religion

and undefiled before God and the Father," consists in two things; beneficence and purity; doing good and keeping clear from sin. Not in one thing, but in two things: not in one without the other, but in both. And this, in my opinion, is a great lesson and a most important doctrine.

I shall not, at present, consider the case of those who are anxious, and effectually so, to maintain, their personal innocency without endeavouring to do good to others; because I really believe it is not a common case. I think that the religious principle which is able to make men confine their passions and desires within the bounds of virtue, is, with very few exceptions, strong enough, at the same time, to prompt and put them upon active exertions.

Therefore I would rather apply myself to that part of the case which is more common, active exertions of benevolence accompanied with looseness of private morals. It is a very common character; but I say, in the first place, it is an inconsistent character; it is doing and undoing; killing and

curing; doing good by our charity, and mischief by our licentiousness; voluntarily relieving misery with one hand, and voluntarily producing and spreading it with the other. No real advance is made in human happiness by this contradiction; no real betterness or improvement promoted.

But then, may not the harm a man does by his personal vices be much less than the good he does by his active virtues? This is a point, in which there is large room for delusion and mistake. Positive charity and acts of humanity are often of a conspicuous nature, naturally and deservedly engaging the praises of mankind, which are followed by our own. No one does, no one ought to speak against them, or attempt to disparage them: but the effect of vice and licentiousness, not only in its immediate consequences, but in its remote and ultimate tendencies, which ought all to be included in the account—the mischief which is done by the example, as well as by the act—is seldom honestly computed by the sinner himself. But I do not dwell further upon this comparison, because I

insist, that no man has a right to make it; no man has a right, whilst he is doing occasional good, and yet indulging his vices and his passions, to strike a balance, as it were, between the good and the harm. This is not Christianity; this is not pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father, let the balance lie on which side it will. For our text declares (and our text declares no more than what the Scriptures testify from one end to the other), that religion demands both. It demands active virtue, and it demands innocency of life. I mean it demands sincere and vigorous endeavours in the pursuit of active virtue, and endeavours equally sincere and firm in the preservation of personal innocence. It makes no calculation which is better; but it requires both.

Shall it be extraordinary, that there should be men, forward in active charity and in positive beneficence, who yet put little or no constraint upon their personal vices? I have said that the character is common, and I will tell you why it is common. The reason is (and there is no other

reason), that it is usually an easier thing to perform acts of beneficence, even of expensive and troublesome beneficence, than it is to command and control our passions; to give up and discard our vices; to burst the bonds of the habits which enslave us. This is the very truth of the case: so that the matter comes precisely to this point. Men of active benevolence, but of loose morals, are men who are performing the duties which are easy to them, and omitting those which are hard. They may place their own character to themselves in what view they please: but this is the truth of the case, and let any one say, whether this be religion; whether this be sufficient. The truly religious man, when he has once decided a thing to be a duty, has no farther question to ask; whether it be easy to be done, or whether it be hard to be done, it is equally a duty. It then becomes a question of fortitude, of resolution, of firmness, of self-command and self-government; but not of duty or obligation; these are already decided upon.

But least of all (and this is the infer-

ence from the text, which I wish most to press upon your attention), least of all does he conceive the hope of reaching heaven by that sort of compromise, which would make easy, nay perhaps pleasant duties, an excuse for duties which are irksome and severe. To recur, for the last time, to the instance mentioned in our text, I can very well believe, that a man of humane temper shall have pleasure in visiting, when by visiting he can succour the fatherless and the widow in their affliction: but if he believes St. James, he will find that this must be joined to and accompanied with another thing, which is neither easy nor pleasant, nay, must always almost be effected with pain and struggle, and mortification and difficulty,—the "keeping himself unspotted from the world."

SERMON XXII.

THE AGENCY OF JESUS CHRIST SINCE HIS ASCENSION.

HEBREWS, xiii. 8.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

THE assertion of the text might be supported by the consideration, that the mission and preaching of Christ have lost nothing of their truth and importance by the lapse of ages, which has taken place since his appearance in the world. If they seem of less magnitude, reality, and concern to us at this present day, than they did to those who lived in the days in which they were carried on: it is only in the same man-

ner as a mountain or a tower appears to be less, when seen at a distance. It is a delusion in both cases. In natural objects we have commonly strength enough of judgment to prevent our being imposed upon by these false appearances; and it is not so much a want or defect of, as it is a neglecting to exert and use, our judgment, if we suffer ourselves to be deceived by them in religion. Distance of space in one case, and distance of time in the other, make no difference in the real nature of the object; and it is a great weakness to allow them to make any difference in our estimate and apprehension. The death of Jesus Christ is, in truth, as interesting to *us*, as it was to those who stood by his cross: his resurrection from the grave is a pledge and assurance of *our* future resurrection, no less than it was of theirs who conversed, who eat and drank with him, after his return to life.

But there is another sense, in which it is still more materially true, that "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." He is personally living, and

acting in the same manner; has been so all along, and will be so to the end of the world. He is the same in his person, in his power, in his office.

First, I say, that he is the same individual person, and is, at this present time existing, living, acting. He is gone up on high. The clouds, at his ascension, received him out of human sight. But whither did he go? to sit for ever at the right hand of God. This is expressly declared concerning him. It is also declared of him, that death hath no more dominion over him; that he is no more to return to corruption. So that, since his ascension, he hath continued in heaven to live and act. His human body, we are likewise given to believe, was changed upon his ascension, that is, was glorified, whereby it became fitted for heaven, and fitted for immortality: no longer liable to decay or age, but thenceforward remaining literally and strictly the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. This change in the human person of Christ is in effect asserted, or rather is referred to, as a thing already known, in that text of Saint

Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, wherein we are assured, that hereafter Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be like his glorious body. Now, the natural body of Christ, before his resurrection at least, was like the natural body of other men; was not a glorious body. At this time therefore, when Saint Paul calls it his glorious body (for it was after his ascension that Saint Paul wrote these words), it must have undergone a great change. In this exalted and glorified state our Lord was seen by Saint Stephen, in the moment of his martyrdom. Being full, you read, of the Holy Ghost, Stephen looked up stedfastly unto heaven, and saw the glory of God*, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. At that seemingly dreadful moment, even when the martyr was surrounded by a band of assassins, with stones ready in their hands to stone him to death, the spectacle, nevertheless, filled his soul with rapture. He cried out in

* The "glory of God," in Scripture, when spoken of as an object of vision, always, I think, means a luminous appearance, bright and refulgent, beyond the splendour of any natural object whatever.

ecstasy, " Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." The same glorious vision was vouchsafed to Saint Paul, at his conversion; and to Saint John at the delivery of the Revelation. This change of our Lord's body was a change, we have reason to believe, of nature and substance, so as to be thenceforward incapable of decay or dissolution. It might be susceptible of any external form, which the particular purpose of his appearance should require. So when he appeared to Stephen and Paul, or to any of his saints, it was necessary he should assume the form which he had borne in the flesh, that he might be known to them. But it is not necessary to suppose that he was confined to that form. The contrary rather appears in the revelation of Saint John, in which, after once showing himself to the apostle, our Lord was afterwards represented to his eyes under different forms. All, however, that is of importance to us to know, all that belongs to our present subject to observe, is, that Christ's glorified person was incapable of dying any more: that it continues

at this day; that it hath all along continued the same real, identical being, as that which went up into heaven in the sight of his apostles; the same essential nature, the same glorified substance, the same proper person.

But, secondly, He is the same also in power. The Scripture doctrine concerning our Lord seems to be this; that, when his appointed commission and his sufferings were closed upon earth, he was advanced in heaven to a still higher state than what he possessed before he came into the world.* This point, as well as the glory of his nature, both before and after his appearance in the flesh, is attested by Saint Paul, in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians. "Being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God." He did not affect to be equal with God, or to appear with divine honours (for such is the sense, which the words in the original will bear), "but made himself of no reputation, and took

* See Sherlock's Sermon on Phil. ii. 9.

upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." "Wherefore," *i. e.* for this his obedience even to the last extremity, even unto death, "God also hath highly exalted him;" or, as it is distinctly and perspicuously expressed in the original, "God also hath *more* highly exalted him," that is, to a higher state than what he even before possessed; insomuch that he hath "given him a name which is above every name; that *at*," or more properly *in*, "the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father:" exactly agreeable to what our Lord himself declared to his disciples after his resurrection, — "All power is given unto me in heaven and in the earth:" Matt. xxviii. 18. You will observe in this passage of Saint Paul, not only the magnificent terms in which Christ's exaltation is described, *viz.* "that every knee should thenceforward bow in his name, and that every tongue should

confess him to be Lord;" but you will observe also, the comprehension and extent of his dominion, — "of things in heaven, of things on earth, of things under the earth." And that we are specifically comprised under this authority and this agency, either of the two following texts may be brought as a sufficient proof: "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of you;" Matt. xviii. 20. which words of our Lord imply a knowledge of, an observation of, an attention to, and an interference with, what passes amongst his disciples upon earth. Or take his final words to his followers, as recorded by Saint Matthew: "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world," — and they carry the same implication. And, lastly, that, in the most awful scene and event of our existence, the day of judgment, we shall not only become the objects, but the immediate objects of Christ's power and agency, is set forth in two clear and positive texts; "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God," John, v. 25. not the voice of God, but the voice of the Son of God. And

then, pursuing the description of what will afterwards take place, our Lord adds, in the next verse but one, — "that the Father hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man;" which is in perfect conformity with what Saint Paul announced to the Athenians, as a great and new doctrine, namely, "that God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

Having shown that the power of Jesus Christ is a subsisting power at this time, the next question is, as to its duration. Now, so far as it respects mankind in this present world, we are assured that it shall continue until the end of the world. Some of the texts which have been adduced, prove this point, as well as that for which they were quoted; and they are confirmed by Saint Paul's declaration, 1 Cor. xv. 24. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father:" therefore he shall retain and exercise

it until *then*. But farther, this power is not only perpetual, but progressive; advancing and proceeding by different steps and degrees, until it shall become supreme and complete, and shall prevail against every enemy and every opposition. That our Lord's dominion will not only remain unto the end of the world, but that its effects in the world will be greatly enlarged and increased, is signified very expressly in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The apostle in this passage applies to our Lord a quotation from the Psalms: "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet:" and then draws from it a strict inference; "for in that he put all things in subjection under him, he left nothing that he did not put under him." And then he remarks, as a fact, "but now we see *not yet* all things put under him:" that complete entire subjection which is here promised hath not yet taken place. The promise must, therefore, refer to a still future order of things. This doctrine of the progressive increase and final completeness, of our Lord's kingdom is also virtually laid down

in the passage from the Corinthians already cited: "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." For that this subjugation of his several enemies will be successive, one after another, is strongly intimated by the expression, "the *last* enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

Now, to apprehend the probability of these things coming to pass, or rather to remove any opinion of their improbability, we ought constantly to bear in our mind this momentous truth, that in the hands of the Deity time is nothing, that he has eternity to act in. The Christian dispensation, nay, the world itself, may be in its infancy. A more perfect display of the power of Christ, and of his religion, may be in reserve: and the ages which it may endure, after the obstacles and impediments to its reception are removed, may be, beyond comparison, longer than those which we have seen, in which it has been struggling with great difficulties, most especially with ignorance and prejudice. We ought not to be moved, any more than the apostles were moved, with the reflection which was cast upon their

mission, that since the "fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were." We ought to return the answer which one of them returned: that what we call tardiness in the Deity, is not so; that our so thinking it, arises from not allowing for the different importance, nay, probably, for the different apprehension of time, in the divine mind and in ours; that with him a thousand years are as one day; words which confound and astonish human understanding, yet strictly and metaphysically true.

Again; we should remember, that the apostles, the very persons, who asserted that God *would* put all things under him, themselves, as we have seen, acknowledged that it was *not yet done.* In the mean time, from the whole of their declarations and of this discussion we collect, that Jesus Christ ascended into the heavens, is, at this day, a great efficient Being in the universe, invested by his Father with a high authority, which he exercises, and will continue to exercise, until the end of the world.

Thirdly, he is the same in his office. The principal offices assigned by the Scriptures to our Lord in his glorified state, that is, since his ascension into heaven, are those of a mediator and intercessor. Of the mediation of our Lord the Scripture speaks in this wise: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. ii. 5. It was after our Lord's ascension that this was spoken of him: and it is plain, from the form and turn of the expression, that his mediatorial character and office was meant to be represented as a perpetual character and office, because it is described in conjunction with the existence of God and men, so long as men exist: "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ." "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name." "At that day ye shall ask in my name." John, xvi. 24, 26. These words form part of our Lord's memorable conversation with his select disciples, not many hours before his death; and clearly intimate the mediatorial office, which he was to discharge after his ascension.

Concerning his *intercession*, not that which he occasionally exercised upon earth, when he prayed, as he did most fervently for his disciples, but that which he now, at this present time, exercises, we have the following text, explicit, satisfactory, and full. "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood:" by priesthood is here meant the office of praying for others. "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us." No words can more plainly declare, than these words do, the perpetuity of our Lord's agency: that it did not cease with his presence upon earth, but continues. "He continueth ever: he ever liveth: he hath an unchangeable priesthood." Surely this justifies what our text saith of him; that he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and that not in a figurative or metaphorical sense, but literally, effectually, and really. Moreover, in this same passage, not only the constancy and perpetuity, but the power and efficacy of our Lord's intercession are asserted: "He is

able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him." They must come unto God: they must come *by* him: and then he is able to save them completely.

These three heads of observation, namely, upon his person, his power, and his office, comprise the relation, in which our Lord Jesus Christ stands to us, whilst we remain in this mortal life. There is another consideration of great solemnity and interest, namely, the relation, which we shall bear to him in our future state. Now the economy, which appears to be destined for the human creation, I mean, for that part of it which shall be received to future happiness, is, that they shall live in a state of local society with one another, and under Jesus Christ as their head: experiencing a sensible connection amongst themselves, as well as the operation of his authority, as their Lord and governor. I think it likely that our Saviour had this state of things in view, when, in his final discourse with his apostles, he tells them: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John, xiv. 2, 3. And again, in the same discourse, and referring to the same economy. "Father," says he, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me;" for that this was spoken, not merely of the twelve, who were then sitting with Jesus, and to whom his discourse was addressed, but of his disciples in future ages of the world, is fairly collected from his words, (xvii. 20.) "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me, through their word." Since the prayer here stated was part of the discourse, it is reasonable to infer, that the discourse, in its object, extended as far as the prayer, which we have seen to include believers, as well of succeeding ages, as of that then present.

Now concerning this future dispensation, supposing it to consist, as here represented, of accepted spirits, participating of happiness in a state of sensible society with

one another, and with Jesus Christ himself at their head, one train of reflection naturally arises; namely, first, that it is highly probable there should be many expressions of Scripture which have relation to it: secondly, that such expressions must, by their nature, appear to us, at present, under a considerable degree of obscurity; which we may be apt to call a defect; thirdly, that the credit due to such expressions must depend upon their authority as portions of the written word of God, and not upon the probability, much less upon the clearness of what they contain; so that our comprehension of what they mean must stop at very general notions; and our belief in them rest in the deference to which they are entitled, as Scripture declarations. Of this kind are many, if not all, of those expressions, which speak so strongly of the value, and benefit, and efficacy of the death of Christ; of its sacrifical, expiatory, and atoning nature. We may be assured, that these expressions mean something real; refer to something real: though it be something, which is to take place in that future dispensation, of which we have been speak-

ing. It is reasonable to expect, that, when we come to experience what that state is, the same experience will open to us the distinct propriety of these expressions, their truth, and the substantial truth which they contain: and likewise show us, that however strong and exalted the terms are which we see made use of, they are not stronger nor higher than the subject called for. But for the present we must be, what I own it is difficult to be, content to take up with very general notions, humbly hoping, that a disposition to receive and to acquiesce in what appears to us to be revealed, be it more or be it less, will be regarded as the duty which belongs to our subsisting condition, and the measure of information with which it is favoured: and will stand in the place of what, from our deep interest in the matter, we are sometimes tempted to desire, but which, nevertheless, might be unfit for us, a knowledge, which not only was, but which we perceived to be, fully adequate to the subject.

There is another class of expressions, which, since they professedly refer to cir-

cumstances that are to take place in this new state, and not before, will, it is likely, be rendered quite intelligible by our experience in that state; but must necessarily convey very imperfect information until they be so explained. Of this kind are many of the passages of Scripture, which we have already noticed, as referring to the changes which will be wrought in our mortal nature; and the agency of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the intervention of his power in producing those changes; and the nearer similitude which our changed natures, and the bodies with which we shall then be clothed, will bear to his. We read, "that he shall change our vile body, that it may be like his glorious body." A momentous assurance, no doubt: yet, in its particular signification, waiting to be cleared up by our experience of the event. So likewise are some other particular expressions relating to the same event, such as being "unclothed," "clothed upon," "the dead in Christ rising first;" "meeting the Lord in the air;" "they that are alive not preventing those that are asleep," and the like. These are all most

interesting intimations: yet to a certain degree obscure. They answer the purpose of ministering to our hopes, and comfort, and admonition, which they do without conveying any clear ideas; and this, and not the satisfaction of our curiosity, may be the grand purpose, for the sake of which intimations of these things were given at all. But then, in so far as they describe a change in the order of nature, of which change we are to be the objects, it seems to follow, that we shall be furnished with experience, which will discover to us the full sense of this language. The same remark may be repeated concerning the first and second death, which are expressly spoken of in the Revelation, and, as I think, alluded to, and supposed in other passages of Scripture, in which they are not named.

The lesson, inculcated by the observation here pointed out, is this, that, in the difficulties which we meet with in interpreting Scripture, instead of being too uneasy under them, by reason of the obscurity of certain passages, or the degree of darkness which hangs over certain subjects, we ought

first to take to ourselves this safe and consoling rule, namely, to make up for the deficiency of our knowledge by the sincerity of our practice; in other words, to act up to what we do know, or, at least, earnestly strive so to do. So far as a man holds fast to this rule, he has a strong ground of comfort under every degree of ignorance, or even of error. And it is a rule applicable to the rich and to the poor, to the educated and the uneducated, to every state and station of life: and to all the differences, which arise from different opportunities of acquiring knowledge. Different obligations may result from different means of obtaining information; but this rule comprises all differences.

The next reflection is, that in meeting with difficulties, nay very great difficulties, we meet with nothing strange, nothing but what in truth might reasonably have been expected beforehand. It was to be expected that a revelation, which was to have its completion in another state of existence, would contain many expressions which referred to that state; and which, on

account of such reference, would be made clear and perfectly intelligible only to those who had experience of that state, and to us after we had attained to that experience; whilst, however, in the meantime, they may convey to us enough of information, to admonish us in our conduct, to support our hopes, and to incite our endeavours. Therefore the meeting with difficulties, owing to this cause, ought not to surprise us, nor to trouble us over much. Seriousness, nay, even anxiety, touching every thing, which concerns our salvation, no thoughtful man can help; but it is possible we may be distressed by doubts and difficulties more than there is any occasion to be distressed.

Lastly, under all our perplexities, under all the misgivings of mind, to which even good men (such is the infirmity of human nature) are subject, there is this important assurance to resort to, that we have a protection over our heads, which is constant and abiding: that God, blessed be his name, is for evermore: that Jesus Christ our Lord is the same yesterday, to-day,

and for ever: that, like as a traveller by land or sea, go where he will, always sees, when he looks up, the same sun; so in our journey through a varied existence, whether it be in our present state, or in our next state, or in the awful passage from one to the other; in the world in which we live, or in the country which we seek; in the hour of death, no less than in the midst of health, we are in the same upholding hands, under the same sufficient and unfailing support.

SERMON XXIII.

OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE IN GENERAL.

IN THREE PARTS.

(PART I.)

1 CORINTHIANS, iii. 16.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

THERE are ways of considering the subject of spiritual influence, as well as a want of considering it, which lay it open to difficulties and to misconceptions. But if the being liable to misapprehension and to misrepresentation be thought an objection to any doctrine, I know of no doctrine which is not liable to the same; nor any

which has not, in fact, been loaded, at various times, with great mistakes.

One difficulty, which has struck the minds of some, is, that the doctrine of an influencing Spirit, and of the importance of this influence to human salvation, is an *arbitrary* system; making every thing to depend, not upon ourselves, nor upon any exertion of our own, but upon the gift of the Spirit.

It is not for us, we allow, to canvass the gifts of God; because we do not, and it seems impossible that we should, sufficiently understand the motive of the giver. In more ordinary cases, and in cases more level to our comprehension, we seem to acknowledge the difference between a debt and a gift. A debt is bound, as it were, by known rules of justice: a gift depends upon the motive of the giver, which often can be known only to himself. To judge of the propriety either of granting or withholding that to which there is no claim (which is, in the strictest sense, a favour, which, as such, rests with the donor to bestow as to him seemeth good), we

must have the several motives, which presented themselves to the mind of the donor, before us. This, with respect to the Divine Being, is impossible. Therefore we allow, that, either in this, or in any other matter, to canvass the gifts of God is a presumption not fit to be indulged. We are to receive our portion of them with thankfulness. We are to be thankful, for instance, for the share of health and strength which is given us, without inquiring why others are healthier and stronger than ourselves. This is the right disposition of mind, with respect to all the benefactions of God Almighty towards us.

But unsearchable does not mean arbitrary. Our necessary ignorance of the motives which rest and dwell in the Divine mind in the bestowing of his grace, is no proof that it is not bestowed by the justest reason. And with regard to the case at present before us, *viz.* the gifts and graces of the Spirit, the charge against it, of its being an arbitrary system, or, in other words, independent of our own endeavours, is not founded in any doctrine or declaration of Scripture. It is not arbitrary in

its origin, in its degree, or in its final success.

First, it is not arbitrary in its origin: for you read that it is given to prayer. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask it." But whether we will ask it or not, depends upon ourselves. It is proposed, you find, as a subject for our prayers: for prayer; not formal, cold, heartless, transitory, but prayer from the soul, prayer earnest and persevering; for this last alone is what the Scripture means by prayer. In this, therefore, it cannot be said to be arbitrary, or independent of our endeavours. On the contrary, the Scripture exhorts us to a striving in prayer for this best of all gifts.

But it will be asked, is not the very first touch of true religion upon the soul, sometimes at least, itself the action of the Holy Spirit? this, therefore, must be prior to our praying for it. And so it may be, and not yet be arbitrarily given. The religious

state of the human soul is exceedingly various. Amongst others, there is a state in which there may be good latent dispositions, suitable faculties for religion, yet no religion. In such a state, the spark alone is wanting. To such a state, the elementary principle of religion may be communicated, though not prayed for. Nor can this be said to be arbitrary. The Spirit of God is given where it is wanted; where, when given, it would produce its effect; but that state of heart and mind upon which the effect was to be produced, might still be the result of moral qualification, improvement and voluntary endeavour. It is not, I think, difficult to conceive such a case as this.

Nevertheless it may be more ordinarily true, that the gift of the Spirit is holden out to the struggling, the endeavouring, the approaching Christian. When the penitent prodigal was yet a great way off, his father saw him. This parable was delivered by our Lord expressly to typify God's dealing with such sinners as are touched with a sense of their condition. And this is one

circumstance in it to be particularly noticed. God sees the returning mind; sees every step and every advance towards him "though we be yet a great way off;" yet at a great distance; though much remains to be done, and to be attained, and to be accomplished. And what he sees, he helps. His aid and influence are assisting to the willing Christian, truly and sincerely willing, though yet in a low and imperfect state of proficiency; nay, though in the outset, as it were, of his religious progress. "The Lord is nigh unto them, that are of a contrite heart:" Psalm xxxiv. 18. But in all this there is nothing arbitrary.

Nor, secondly, is the operation of the Spirit arbitrary in its degree. It has a rule, and its rule is this: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." Now of this rule, which is expressed under some, but under no great difference of phrase, in all the first three Gospels, I have first to observe, that, though it carry the appearance of harsh-

ness and injustice, it is neither the one nor the other, but is correctly and fundamentally just. The meaning is, that whosoever uses, exercises, and improves the gifts which he has received, shall continue to receive still larger portions of these gifts; nay, he who has already received the largest portion, provided he adequately and proportionably uses his gifts, shall also in future receive the largest portion. More and more will be added to him that has the most: whilst he who neglects the little which he has, shall be deprived even of that. That this is the sound exposition of these texts is proved from hence, that one of them is used as the application of the parable of the talents, concerning the meaning of which parable there can be no doubt at all: for there, he who had received, and, having received, had duly improved, ten talents, was placed over ten cities; and of him the expression in question is used; "whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." On the contrary, he who had received one talent, and had neglected what he had received, had it taken from

him: and of him the other part of the expression is used; "whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." But there is a point still remaining, *viz.* whether this Scripture rule be applicable to spiritual gifts. I answer, that it is so applied, more especially to spiritual knowledge, and the use which we make thereof: "Take heed how ye hear: unto you that hear shall more be given: for he that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." So stands the passage in Mark; and substantially the same, that is, with a view to the same application, the passage stands in Matthew and Luke. I consider it, therefore, to be distinctly asserted, that this is the rule with regard to spiritual knowledge. And I think the analogy conclusive with regard to other spiritual gifts. In all which there is nothing arbitrary.

Nor, thirdly, is it arbitrary in its final success. "Grieve not the Spirit of God." Therefore he may be grieved. "And hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace."

Heb. x. 29. Therefore he may be despised. Both these are leading texts upon the subject. And so is the following. — "And his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain," 1 Cor. xv. 10. Therefore it might have been in vain. The influence therefore, of the Spirit, may not prevail, even as the admonitions of a friend, the warnings of a parent, may not prevail, may not be successful, may not be attended to; may be rejected, may be resisted, may be despised, may be lost. So that both in its gift, in its degree, operation, and progress, and above all, in its final effect, it is connected with our own endeavours; it is not arbitrary. Throughout the whole, it does not supersede, but co-operate with ourselves.

But another objection is advanced, and from an opposite quarter. It is said, that if the influence of the Spirit depend, after all, upon our endeavours, the doctrine is nugatory: it comes to the same thing, as if salvation was put upon ourselves and our own endeavours alone, exclusive of every further consideration, and without referring

us to any influence or assistance whatever. I answer, that this is by no means true: that it is not the same thing, either in reality or in opinion, or in the consequences of that opinion.

Assuredly it is not the same thing in reality. Is it the same thing, whether we perform a work by our own strength, or by obtaining the assistance and co-operation of another? Or does it make it the same thing, that this assistance is to be obtained by means which it is in our own choice to use or not? Or, because, when the assistance is obtained, we may, or may not, avail ourselves of it: or because we may, by neglecting, lose it? After all, they are two different things, performing a work by ourselves, and performing it by means of help.

Again; It is not the same thing in the opinions and sentiments, and dispositions which accompany it. A person who knows or believes himself to be beholden to another for the progress and success of an undertaking, though still carried on by his own endeavours, acknowledges his friend

and his benefactor; feels his dependency and his obligation; turns to him for help and aid in his difficulties; is humble under the want and need, which he finds he has, of assistance; and, above all things, is solicitous not to lose the benefit of that assistance. This is a different turn of mind, and a different way of thinking, from his, who is sensible of no such want, who relies entirely upon his own strength; who, of course, can hardly avoid being proud of his success, or feeling the confidence, the presumption, the self-commendation, and the pretensions, which, however they might suit with a being, who achieves his work by his own powers, by no means, and in no wise, suit with a frail constitution, which must ask and obtain the friendly aid and help of a kind and gracious benefactor, before he can proceed in the business set out for him, and which it is of unspeakable consequence to him to execute somehow or other.

It is thus in religion. A sense of spiritual weakness and of spiritual wants, a belief that divine aid and help are to be

had, are principles which carry the soul to God; make us think of him, and think of him in earnest; convert, in a word, morality into religion; bring us round to holiness of life, by the road of piety and devotion; render us humble in ourselves, and grateful towards God. There are two dispositions which compose the true Christian character; humility as to ourselves, affection and gratitude as to God; and both these are natural fruits and effects of the persuasion we speak of. And what is of the most importance of all, this persuasion will be accompanied with a corresponding fear, lest we should neglect, and, by neglecting, lose this invaluable assistance.

On the one hand, therefore, it is not true, that the doctrine of an influencing Spirit is an arbitrary system, setting aside our own endeavours. Nor, on the other hand, is it true, that the connecting it with our own endeavours, as obtained through them, as assisting them, as co-operating with them, renders the doctrine unimportant, or all one as putting the whole upon our endea-

vours without any such doctrine. If it be true, in fact, that the feebleness of our nature requires the succouring influence of God's Spirit in carrying on the grand business of salvation: and in every state and stage of its progress, in conversion, in regeneration, in constancy, in perseverance, in sanctification; it is of the utmost importance that this truth be declared, and understood, and confessed, and felt: because the perception and sincere acknowlegement of it will be accompanied by a train of sentiments, by a turn of thought, by a degree and species of devotion, by humility, by prayer, by piety, by a recourse to God in our religious warfare, different from what will, or perhaps can, be found in a mind unacquainted with this doctrine: or in a mind rejecting it, or in a mind unconcerned about these things one way or other.

SERMON XXIV.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT.

(PART II.)

1 CORINTHAINS, iii. 16.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.

IT is undoubtedly a difficulty in the doctrine of spiritual influence, that we do not so perceive the action of the Spirit, as to distinguish it from the suggestions of our own minds. Many good men acknowledge, that they are not conscious of any such immediate perceptions. They, who lay claim to them, cannot advance, like the apostles, such proofs of their claim as must necessarily satisfy others, or, perhaps, secure themselves fom delusion. And this is made a ground of objection to the doctrine itself.

Now, I think the objection proceeds upon an erroneous principle, namely, our expecting more than is promised. The agency and influence of the Divine Spirit are spoken of in Scripture, and are promised: but it is no where promised that his operations shall be always *sensible*, viz. distinguishable at the time from the impulses, dictates, and thoughts of our own minds. I do not take upon me to say that they are never so; I only say that it is not necessary in the nature of things, that they should be so: nor is it asserted in the Scripture that they are so; nor is it promised that they will be so.

The nature of the thing does not imply or require it; by which I mean, that according to the constitution of the human mind, as far as we are acquainted with that constitution, a foreign influence or impulse may act upon it, without being distinguished in our perception from its natural operations, that is, without being perceived at the time. The case appears to me to be this: The order in which ideas and motives rise up in our minds is utterly un-

known to us, consequently it will be unknown when that order is disturbed, or altered, or affected; therefore it may be altered, it may be affected, by the interposition of a foreign influence, without that interposition being perceived.

Again; and in like manner, not only the *order* in which thoughts and motives rise up in our minds is unknown to ourselves, but the causes also are unknown, and are incalculable, upon which the vividness of the ideas, the force and strength and impression of the motives, which enter into our minds, depend. Therefore that vividness may be made more or less, that force may be increased or diminished, and both by the influence of a spiritual agent, without any distinct sensation of such agency being felt at the time. Was the case otherwise; was the order, according to which thoughts and motives rise up in our minds, fixed, and, being fixed, known: then I do admit the order could not be altered or violated, nor a foreign agent interfere to alter or violate it, without our being immediately sensible of what was passing. As, also, if the causes, upon which the power and

strength of either good or bad motives depend, were ascertained, then it would likewise be ascertained, when this force was ever increased or diminished by external influence and operation: then it might be true, that external influence could not act upon us without being perceived. But in the ignorance under which we are concerning the thoughts and motives of our minds, when left to themselves, we must, naturally speaking, be, at the time, both ignorant and insensible of the presence of an interfering power; one ignorance will correspond with the other: whilst, nevertheless, the assistance and benefit derived from that power, may, in reality, be exceedingly great.

In this instance, philosophy, in my opinion, comes in aid of religion. In the ordinary state of mind, both the presence and the power of the motives which act upon it, proceed from causes of which we know nothing. This philosophy confesses and indeed teaches. From whence it follows, that when these causes are interrupted or influenced, that interruption and that influence will be equally unknown to

us. Just reasoning shows this proposition to be a consequence of the former. From whence it follows again, that immediately and at the time perceiving the operation of the Holy Spirit, is not only not necessary to the reality of these operations, but that it is not consonant to the frame of the human mind that it should be so. I repeat again, that we take not upon us to assert that it is never so. Undoubtedly God can, if he please, give that tact and quality to his communications, that they shall be perceived to be divine communications at the time. And this probably was very frequently the case with the prophets, with the apostles, and with inspired men of old. But it is not the case, naturally; by which I mean, that it is not the case according to the constitution of the human soul. It does not appear by experience to be the case usually. What would be the effect of the influence of the Divine Spirit being always or generally accompanied with a distinct notice, it is difficult even to conjecture. One thing may be said of it, that it would be putting us under a quite different dispensation. It

would be putting us under a miraculous dispensation: for the agency of the Spirit in our souls distinctly perceived is, properly speaking, a miracle. Now miracles are instruments in the hand of God of signal and extraordinary effects, produced upon signal and extraordinary occasions. Neither internally nor externally do they form the ordinary course of his proceeding, with his reasonable creatures.

And in this there is a close analogy with the course of nature, as carried on under the divine government. We have every reason which Scripture can give us, for believing that God frequently interposes to turn and guide the order of events in the world, so as to make them execute his purpose; yet we do not so perceive these interpositions, as, either always or generally to distinguish them from the natural progress of things. His providence is real, but unseen. We distinguish not between the acts of God and the course of nature. It is so with the Spirit. When, therefore, we teach that good men may be led, or bad men converted, by the Spirit of

God, and yet they themselves not distinguish his holy influence; we teach no more than what is conformable, as, I think, has been shown to the frame of the human mind, or rather to our degree of acquaintance with that frame: and also analogous to the exercise of divine power in other things: and also necessary to be so; unless it should have pleased God to put us under a quite different dispensation, that is, under a dispensation of constant miracles.

I do not apprehend that the doctrine of spiritual influence carries the agency of the Deity much farther than the doctrine of providence carries it: or, however, than the doctrine of prayer carries it. For all prayer supposes the Deity to be intimate with our minds.

But if we do not know the influence of the Spirit by a distinguishing perception at the time, by what means do we know any thing of it at all? I answer by its *effects*, and by those alone. And this I conceive to be that which our Saviour said

to Nicodemus: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit:" that is, thou perceivest an effect, but the cause which produces that effect, operates in its own way, without thy knowing its rule or manner of operation. With regard to the cause, "thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth." A change or improvement in thy religious state is necessary. The agency and help of the Spirit in working that change, or promoting that improvement, are likewise necessary.

"Except a man be born of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." But according to what particular manner, or according to what rule, the Spirit acts, is as unknown to us as the causes are which regulate the blowing of the wind, the most incalculable and unknown thing in the world. Its origin is unknown; its mode is unknown; but still it is known in its effects: and so it is with the Spirit. If the change have taken place;

if the improvement be produced and be proceeding; if our religious affairs go on well; then have we ground for trust, that the enabling, assisting Spirit of God is with us; though we have no other knowledge or perception of the matter than what this affords.

Perhaps there is no subject whatever, in which we ought to be so careful not to go before our guide, as in this of spiritual influence. We ought neither to expect more than what is promised, nor to take upon ourselves to determine what the Scriptures have not determined. This safe rule will produce both caution in judging of ourselves, and moderation in judging, or rather a backwardness in taking upon us to judge, of others. The modes of operation of God's Spirit are probably extremely various and numerous. This variety is intimated by our Saviour's comparing it with the blowing of the wind. We have no right to limit it to any particular mode, forasmuch as the Scriptures have not limited it: nor does observation enable us to do it with any degree of certainty.

The conversion of a sinner, for instance, may be sudden, nay, may be instantaneous, yet be both sincere and permanent. We have no authority whatever to deny the possibility of this. On the contrary, we ought to rejoice, when we observe in any one even the appearance of such a change. And this change may not only by possibility be sudden, but sudden changes may be more frequent than our observations would lead us to expect. For we can observe only effects, and these must have time to show themselves in; whilst the change of heart may be already wrought. It is a change of heart which is attributable to the Spirit of God, and this may be sudden. The fruits, the corresponding effects, external reformation, and external good actions, will follow in due time. "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh; and will give them an heart of flesh:" Ezekiel, xi. 19. These words may well describe God's dealings with his moral creatures, and the operations of his grace. Then follows a description of the effects of these dealings, of these operations, of that grace, *viz.* "that they may walk in my

statutes, and keep my ordinances and do them;" which represents a permanent habit and course of life (a thing of continuance) resulting from an inward change which ought to be a thing produced at once.

In the mean time it may be true, that the more ordinary course of God's grace is gradual and successive; helping from time to time our endeavours, succouring our infirmities, strengthening our resolutions; "making with the temptation a way to escape;" promoting our improvement, assisting our progress; warning, rebuking, encouraging, comforting, attending us as it were, through the different stages of our laborious advance in the road of salvation.

And as the operations of the Spirit are indefinite, so far as we know, in respect of time, so are they likewise in respect of mode. They may act, and observation affords reason to believe that they do sometimes act, by adding force and efficacy to instruction, advice, or admonition.

A passage of Scripture sometimes strikes the heart with wonderful power; adheres, as it were, and cleaves to the memory, till it has wrought its work. An impressive sermon is often known to sink very deep. It is not, perhaps, too much to hope, that the Spirit of God should accompany his ordinances, provided a person bring to them seriousness, humility, and devotion. For example, the devout receiving of the Holy Sacrament may draw down upon us the gift and benefit of Divine grace, or increase our measure of it. This, as being the most solemn act of our religion, and also an appointment of the religion itself, may be properly placed first: but every species of prayer, provided it be earnest; every act of worship, provided it be sincere, may participate in the same effect; may be to us the occasion, the time, and the instrument of this greatest of all gifts.

In all these instances, and in all, indeed, that relates to the operations of the Spirit, we are to judge, if we will take upon us to judge at all (which I do not see that we

are obliged to do), not only with great candour and moderation, but also with great reserve and caution; and as to the modes of Divine grace, or of its proceedings in the hearts of men, as of things undetermined in Scripture and indeterminable by us. In our own case, which it is of infinitely more importance to each of us to manage rightly, than it is to judge even truly of other men's, we are to use perseveringly, every appointed, every reasonable, every probable, every virtuous endeavour to render ourselves objects of that merciful assistance, which undoubtedly and confessedly we much want, and which, in one way or other, God, we are assured, is willing to afford.

SERMON XXV.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT.

(PART III.)

1 CORINTHIANS, iii. 16.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God; and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

AS all doctrine ought to end in practice, and all sound instruction lead to right conduct, it comes, in the last place, to be considered, what obligations follow from the tenet of an assisting grace and spiritual influence; what is to be done on our part in consequence of holding such a persuasion; what is the behaviour corresponding and consistent with such an opinion. For we must always bear in mind, that the Grace and Spirit of God no more take away our

freedom of action, our personal and moral liberty, than the advice, the admonitions, the suggestions, the reproofs, the expostulations, the counsels of a friend or parent, would take them away. We may act either right or wrong, notwithstanding these interferences. It still depends upon ourselves which of the two we will do. We are not machines under these impressions, nor are we under the impression of the Holy Spirit. Therefore there is a class of duties relating to this subject, as much as any other; and more, perhaps, than any other important.

And, first, I would apply myself to an objection which belongs to this, namely, the practical part of the subject: which objection is, that the doctrine of spiritual influence, and the preaching of this doctrine, causes men to attend chiefly to the feelings within them; to place religion in feelings and sensations, and to be content with such feelings and sensations, without coming to active duties and real usefulness; that it tends to produce a contemplative religion, accompanied with a sort

of abstraction from the interests of this world, as respecting either ourselves or others; a sort of quietism and indifference which contributes nothing to the good of mankind, or to make a man serviceable in his generation; that men of this description sit brooding over what passes in their hearts, without performing any good actions, or well discharging their social or domestic obligations, or indeed guarding their outward conduct with sufficient care.

Now if there be any foundation in fact for this charge, it arises from some persons holding this doctrine defectively; I mean from their not attending to one main point in the doctrine, which is, that the promise is not to those who have the Spirit, but to those who are *led* by the Spirit; not to those who are favoured with its suggestions, but to those who give themselves up to *follow*, and do actually *follow*, these suggestions. Now, though a person, by attending to his feelings and consciousnesses, may persuade himself that he has the Spirit of God; yet, if he stop and rest in these sensations without consequential practical

exertions, it can by no possibility be said of him, nor, one would think, could he possibly bring himself to believe, that he is *led* by the Spirit, that he *follows* the Spirit: for these terms necessarily imply something *done* under that influence; necessarily carry the thoughts to a course of conduct entered into and pursued in obedience to, and by virtue of, that influence. Whether the objection here noticed has any foundation in the conduct of those who hold the doctrine of which we treat, I am uncertain; accounts are different; but at any rate the objection lies, not against the doctrine, but against a defective apprehension of it. For, in confirmation of all which we have said, we may produce the example of St. Paul. No one carried the doctrine of spiritual influence higher than he did, or spoke of it so much; yet no character in the world could be farther than his was from resting in feelings and sensations. On the contrary, it was all activity and usefulness. His whole history confirms what he said of himself, that "in labours," in positive exertions, both of mind and body, he was "above measure."

It will be said, perhaps, that these exertions were in a particular way, *viz.* in making converts to his opinions: but it was the way in which, as he believed, he was promoting the interests of his fellow-creatures in the greatest degree possible for him to promote them; and it was the way also which he believed to be enjoined upon him by the express and particular command of God. Had there been any other method, any other course and line of beneficent endeavours, in which he thought he could have been more useful, and had the choice been left to himself (which it was not), the same principle, the same eager desire of doing good, would have manifested itself with equal vigour in that other line. His sentiments and precepts corresponded with his example: "Do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of Christ." Here *doing* is enjoined. Nothing less than doing can satisfy this precept. Feelings and sensations will not, though of the best kind. "Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour with his hands that he may have to give to him that need-

eth." This is carrying active beneficence as far as it can go. Men are commanded to relieve the necessities of their poor brethren out of the earnings of their manual labour, nay, to labour for that very purpose: and their doing so is stated as the best expiation for former dishonesties, and the best proof how much and how truly they are changed from what they were. "Let him that ruleth, do it with diligence." This is a precept which cannot be complied with without activity. These instructions could not come from a man who placed religion in feelings and sensations.

Having noticed this objection (for it well deserved notice), I proceed to state the particular duties which relate to the doctrine of spiritual assistance. And the first of these duties is to *pray for it.* It is by prayer that it is to be sought: by prayer that it is to be obtained. This the Scriptures expressly teach. "How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" The foundation of prayer, in all cases, is a sense of want. No man prays in earnest or to any pur-

pose for what he does not feel that he wants. Know then and feel the weakness of your nature. Know the infinite importance of holding on, nevertheless, in a course of virtue. Know these two points thoroughly, and you can stand in need of no additional motive (indeed none can be added), to excite in you strong unwearied supplications for divine help: not a cold asking for it in any prescribed form of prayer, but cryings and supplications for it, strong and unwearied. The description, in the epistle to the Hebrews, of our Lord's own devotion, may serve to describe the devotion of a Christian, praying, as he ought, for the Spirit; that is, praying from a deep understanding of his own condition, a conviction of his wants and necessities. "He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death; and was heard in that he feared." This is devotion in reality.

There are occasions also, which ought to call forth these prayers with extraordinary and peculiar force.

Is it superstition? is it not, on the contrary, a just and reasonable piety, to implore of God the guidance of his Holy Spirit, when we have any thing of great importance to decide upon, or to undertake; especially any thing by which the happiness of others, as well as our own, is likely to be affected?

It would be difficult to enumerate the passages and occasions of a man's life, in which he is particularly bound to apply to God for the aid and direction of his Spirit. In general, in every *turn*, as it may be called, of life; whenever any thing critical, any thing momentous, any thing which is to fix our situation and course of life; most especially any thing which is likely to have an influence upon our moral conduct and disposition, and thereby affect our condition, as candidates for heaven, and as the religious servants of God, is to be resolved upon; *there* and *then* ought we to say our prayers; most ardently supplicating from our Creator and Preserver the grace and guidance of his Holy Spirit.

Is it not, again, a time for calling earnestly for the Spirit of God, and for a greater measure of that Spirit, if he be pleased to grant it to us, when we are recovering from some sin, into which we have been betrayed? This case is always critical. The question now is, whether we shall fall into a second course of sinning, or whether we shall be restored to our former, and to better than our former, endeavours to maintain the line of duty. That, under the sting and present alarm of our conscience, we have formed resolutions of virtue for the future, is supposed: but whether these resolutions will stand, is the point now at issue. And in this peril of our souls we cannot be too earnest or importunate in our supplications for divine succour. It can never come to our aid at a time when we more want it. Our fall proves our weakness. Our desire of recovery proves, that, though fallen, we may not be lost. This is a condition which flies to aid and help, if aid and help can be had; and it is a condition to which the promised support of the Spirit most peculiarly applies. On such an occasion, there-

fore, it will be sought with struggles and strong contention of mind, if we be serious in these matters. So sought, it will be obtained.

Again; is it not always a fit subject of prayer, that the Holy Spirit would inform, animate, warm, and support our *devotions?* St. Paul speaks of the co-operation of the Spirit with us in this very article. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for *we* know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." The specific help here described is to supply our ignorance. But the words speak also generally of helping our infirmities; meaning, as the passage leads us to suppose, the infirmities which attend our devotion. Now these infirmities are not only ignorance, but coldness, wanderings, absence; for all which a remedy is to be sought in the aid and help of the Spirit.

Next in order of time, to praying for the Spirit of God, but still superior to it in importance, is *listening* and *yielding our-*

selves to his suggestions. This is the thing in which we fail.

Now, it being confessed that we cannot ordinarily distinguish at the time the suggestions of the Spirit from the operations of our minds, it may be asked, how are we to listen to them? The answer is, by attending *universally* to the admonitions within us. Men do not listen to their consciences. It is through the whisperings of conscience that the Spirit speaks. If men then are wilfully deaf to their consciences, they cannot hear the Spirit. If hearing, if being compelled to hear, the remonstrances of conscience, they nevertheless decide, and resolve, and determine to go against them; then they grieve, then they defy, then they do despite to, the Spirit of God. In both cases, that is, both of neglecting to consult, and of defying, when they cannot help feeling the admonitions which rise up within them, they have this judgment hanging over their heads: "He that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." He that misuses or abuses the portion and measure of spiritual assistance which is afforded him shall lose even that.

The efficacy of the Spirit is to be judged of by its fruits. Its immediate effects are upon the disposition. A visible outward conduct will ensue; but the true seat of grace and of spiritual energy is in the heart and inward disposition. Whenever, therefore, we find religious carelessness succeeded within us by religious seriousness; conscience, which was silent or unheard, now powerfully speaking and obeyed; sensuality and selfishness, the two grand enemies of salvation, the two great powers of darkness, which rule the natural man, when we find even these giving way to the inward accusing voice of conscience; when we find the thoughts of the mind drawing or drawn more and more towards heavenly things; the value and interest of these expectations plainer to our view, a great deal more frequent than heretofore in our meditations, and more fully discerned; the care and safety of our souls rising gradually above concerns and anxieties about worldly affairs; when we find the force of temptation and of evil propensities, not extinct, but retreating before a sense of duty; self-go-

vernment maintained; the interruptions of it immediately perceived, bitterly deplored, and soon recovered; sin rejected and repelled; and this not so much with increase of confidence in our strength, as of reliance upon the assisting grace of God; when we find ourselves touched with the love of our Maker, taking satisfaction in his worship and service; when we feel a growing taste and relish for religious subjects, and religious exercises; above all when we begin to rejoice in the comfort of the Holy Ghost; in the prospect of reaching heaven; in the powerful aids and helps which are given us in accomplishing this great end, and the strength, and firmness, and resolution, which, so helped and aided, we experience in our progress; when we feel these things, then may we, without either enthusiasm or superstition, humbly believe, that the Spirit of God hath been at work within us. External virtues, good actions will follow, as occasions may draw them forth; but it is *within* that we must look for the change, which the inspiration of God's Spirit produces.

With respect to positive external good actions, we have said that they must depend in some measure upon occasions, and abilities and opportunities; and that they must wait for opportunities, but, observe, it is not so with the breaking off of our sins, be they what they will. That work must wait for nothing. Until that be effected no change is made. No man, going on in a known sin, has any right to say, that the Spirit of God has done its office within him. Either it has not been given to him, or, being given, it has been resisted, despised, or, at least, neglected. Such a person has either yet to obtain it by prayer, or, when obtained, to avail himself duly of its assistance. Let him understand this to be his condition.

The next duty, or rather disposition, which flows from the doctrine of spiritual influence, is *humility*. There never was a truer saying, than that pride is the adversary of religion, lowliness and humility the tempers for it. Now religious humility consists in the habit of referring every thing to God. From one end of the New Tes-

tament to the other, God is set forth and magnified in his agency and his operations. In the greatest of all businesses, the business of salvation, He is operating, and we co-operating with him. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" and why? "for it is God that worketh in us to will and to do, according to his good pleasure." He is not superseding our endeavours (the very contrary is implied by commanding us to exert them), but still nothing is done without him. If we have moral strength, we are strong in the inward might of the Holy Ghost: consequently all boasting, all vanity, all self-sufficiency, all despising of others, on the score of moral and religious inferiority, are excluded. Without the grace of God, we might have been as the worst of them. There is, in the nature of things, one train of sentiment belonging to him, who has achieved a work by his own might, and power, and prowess; and another to him who had been fain to beg for succour and assistance, and by that assistance alone has been carried through difficulties, which were too great for his own strength and

faculties. This last is the true sentiment for us. It is not for a man, whose life has been saved in a shipwreck by the compassionate help of others; it is not for a man, so saved, to boast of his own alertness and vigour; though it be true, that, unless he had exerted what power and strength he was possessed of, he would not have been saved at all.

Lastly, this doctrine shuts the door against a most general, a most specious, and a most deceiving excuse for our sins; which excuse is, that we have striven against them, but are overpowered by our evil nature, by that nature which the Scriptures themselves represent as evil; in a word, that we have done what we could. Now until, by supplication and prayer, we have called for the promised assistance of God's Spirit, and with an earnestness, devotion, perseverance, and importunity, proportioned to the magnitude of the concern; until we have rendered ourselves objects of that influence, and yielded ourselves to it, it is not true, "that we have done all that we can." We must not rely

upon that excuse; for it is not true in fact. If experiencing the depravity and imbecility of our nature, we see in this corruption and weakness an excuse for our sins, and taking up with this excuse, we surrender ourselves to them; if we give up, or relax in, our opposition to them, and struggles against them, at last consenting to our sins, and falling down with the stream, which we have found so hard to resist; if things take this turn with us, then are we in a state to be utterly, finally, and fatally undone. We have it in our power to shut our eyes against the danger: we naturally shall endeavour to make ourselves as easy and contented in our situation as we can; but the truth, nevertheless, is, that we are hastening to certain perdition. If, on the contrary, perceiving the feebleness of our nature, we be driven by the perception, as St. Paul was driven, to fly for deliverance from our sins, to the aid and influence and power of God's Spirit, to seek for divine help and succour, as a sinking mariner calls out for help and succour, not formally, we may be sure, or coldly, but with cries and tears and sup-

plications, as for life itself: if we be prepared to co-operate with this help, with the holy working of God's grace within us; then may we trust, both that it will be given to us (yet in such manner as to God shall seem fit, and which cannot be limited by us); and also that the portion of help which is given being duly used and improved, (not despised, neglected, put away,) more and more will be continually added, for the ultimate accomplishment of our great end and object, the deliverance of our souls from the captivity and the consequences of sin.

SERMON XXVI.

SIN ENCOUNTERED BY SPIRITUAL AID.

IN THREE PARTS.

(PART I.)

ROMANS, vii. 24.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

BEFORE we can explain what is the precise subject of this heavy lamentation, and what the precise meaning of the solemn question here asked, we must endeavour to understand what is intended by the expression, "the body of this death," or as some render it, "this body of death."

Now let it be remembered, that death, in Saint Paul's epistles, hardly ever signifies a natural death, to which all men of all kinds are equally subjected; but it means a spiritual death, or that perdition and destruction to which sin brings men in a future state. "The wages of sin is death;" not the death which we must all undergo in this world; for that is the fate of righteousness as well as sin; but the state, whatever it be, to which sin and sinners will be consigned in the world to come. Not many verses after our text, Saint Paul says, carnal-mindedness is death: "to be carnally minded is death," leads, that is, inevitably to that future destruction which awaits the sinful indulgence of carnal propensities, and which destruction is, as it were, death to the soul. The book of Revelation, alluding to this distinction speaks expressly of a *second death*, in terms very fit to be called to mind in the consideration of our present text. "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged

out of those things which were written, according to their works; and the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell (which last word denotes here simply the place of the dead, not the place of punishment) delivered up the dead that were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works; and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire; (that is, natural death, and the receptacle of those who died, were thenceforth superseded.) *This is the second death.* And whatsoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire." This description, which is exceedingly awful, is given in the last four verses of the 20th chapter. In reference to the same event, this book of Revelation had before told us, *viz.* in the 2d chapter and 11th verse, that he who overcometh shall not be hurt of the *second* death; and in like manner in the above-quoted 20th chapter; "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in this resurrection; on such the second death hath no power." Our Lord himself refers to this death in those never to be forgotten words which

he uttered, " He that liveth and believeth in me, shall not die eternally." Die he must, but not eternally; die the first death, but not the second. It is undoubtedly, therefore, the second death, which Saint Paul meant by the word death, when he wrote down the sentence, " the body of this death :" and the second death is the punishment, perdition, and destruction, which the souls of sinners will suffer in a future state. It is well worthy of observation, that this was indeed the only death which those who wrote the New Testament, and probably all sincere Christians of that age, regarded as important; as the subject of their awe, and dread and solicitude. The first death, the natural and universal decease of the body, they looked to simply as a change, a going out of one room into another; a putting off one kind of clothing, and putting on a different kind. They esteemed it, compared with the other, of little moment or account. In this respect there is a wide difference between the Scripture apprehension of the subject and ours. We think entirely of the first death; they

thought entirely of the second. We speak and talk of the death which we see: they spoke, and taught, and wrote of a death which is future to that. We look to the first with terror; they to the second alone. The second alone they represent as formidable. Such is the view which Christianity gives us of these things, so different from what we naturally entertain.

You see then what death is in the Scripture sense, in Saint Paul's sense. "The body of this death." The phrase and expression of the text cannot, however, mean this death itself, because he prays to be delivered from it: whereas from that death, or that perdition understood by it, when it once overtakes the sinner, there is no deliverance that we know of. The "body," then, "of this death," is not the death itself, but a state leading to and ending in the second death, namely, in misery and punishment, instead of happiness and rest, after our departure out of this world. And this state it is, from which Saint Paul, with such vehemence and concern upon his spirits, seeks to be delivered.

Having seen the signification of the principal phrase employed in the text, the next and the most important question is, to what condition of the soul, in its moral and religious concerns, the apostle applies it. Now in the verses preceding the text, indeed in the whole of this remarkable chapter, St. Paul has been describing a state of struggle and contention with sinful propensities; which propensities, in the present condition of our nature, we all feel, and which are never wholly abolished. But our apostle goes further: he describes also that state of *unsuccessful* struggle and *unsuccessful* contention, by which many so unhappily fall. His words are these, "that which I do I allow not; for what I would, that I do not, but what I hate, that do I. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not; for the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law

in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

This account, though the style and manner of expression in which it is delivered be very peculiar, is, in its substance, no other than what is strictly applicable to the case of thousands. "The good that I would, I do not: the evil which I would not, that I do." How many, who read this discourse may say the same of themselves? as also, "what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that I do!" This then is the case which Saint Paul had in view. It is a case, first, which supposes an informed and enlightened conscience. "I delight in the law of God." "I had not known sin but by the law." "I consent unto the law that it is good." These sentiments could be uttered only by a man who was in a considerable degree at least, acquainted with his duty, and who also approved of the rule of duty which he found laid down.

Secondly, the case before us also sup-

poses an inclination of mind, and judgment to perform our duty. "When I *would* do good, evil is present with me: to *will* is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not."

Thirdly, it supposes this inclination of mind and judgment to be continually overpowered. "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members;" that is, the evil principle not only opposes the judgment of the mind, and the conduct which that judgment dictates (which may be the case with all), but in the present case subdues and gets the better of it. "Not only wars against the law of my mind, but brings me into captivity."

Fourthly, the case supposes a sense and thorough consciousness of all this; of the rule of duty, of the nature of sin; of the struggle; of the defeat. It is a prisoner sensible of his chains. It is a soul tired and bound by the fetters of its sins, and knowing itself to be so. It is by no means the

case of the ignorant sinner: it is not the case of an erring, mistaken conscience; it is not the case of a seared and hardened conscience. None of these could make the reflection or the complaint which is here described. "The commandment, which was ordained unto life, *I* found to be unto death. I am carnal, sold under sin. In me dwelleth no good thing. The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good; but sin, that it might appear sin, (that it might be more conspicuous, aggravated, and inexcusable,) works death in me by that which is good." This language by no means belongs to the stupified, insensible sinner.

Nor, fifthly, as it cannot belong to an original insensibility of conscience, that is, an insensibility of which the person himself does not remember the beginning, so neither can it belong to the sinner who has got over the rebukes, distrusts, and uneasiness which sin once occasioned. True it is, that this uneasiness *may* be got over almost entirely; so that whilst the danger remains the same, whilst the final event will be the same, whilst the coming destruction is not less sure or

dreadful, the uneasiness and the apprehension are gone. This is a case too common, too deplorable, too desperate; but it is not the case of which we are now treating, or of which Saint Paul treated. Here we are presented throughout with complaint and uneasiness; with a soul exceedingly dissatisfied, exceedingly indeed disquieted, and disturbed, and alarmed, with the view of its condition.

Upon the whole, Saint Paul's account is the account of a man in some sort struggling with his vices; at least deeply conscious of what they are, whither they are leading him, where they will end; acknowledging the law of God, not only in words and speeches, but in his mind; acknowledging its excellency, its authority; wishing, also, and willing to act up to it, but, in fact, doing no such thing; feeling, in practice, a lamentable inability of doing his duty, yet perceiving that it must be done. All he has hitherto attained is a state of successive resolutions and relapses. Much is willed, nothing is effected. No furtherance, no advance, no progress is

made in the way of salvation. He feels, indeed, his double nature; but he finds, that the law in his members, the law of the flesh, brings the whole man into captivity. He may have some better strivings, but they are unsuccessful. The result is that he obeys the law of sin.

This is the picture which our apostle contemplated, and he saw in it nothing but misery: "O wretched man that I am!" Another might have seen it in a more comfortable light. He might have hoped that the will would be taken for the deed; that, since he felt in his mind a strong approbation of the law of God, nay, since he felt a delight in contemplating it, and openly professed to do so, since he was neither ignorant of it, nor forgetful of it, nor insensible of its obligation, nor ever set himself to dispute its authority, nay, since he had occasionally likewise endeavoured to bring himself to an obedience to this law, however unsuccessful his endeavours had been; above all, since he has sincerely deplored and bewailed his fallings off from it, he might hope, I say, that his was a case for favourable acceptance.

Saint Paul saw it *not* in this light. He saw in it no ground of confidence or satisfaction. It was a state, to which he gives no better name than "the body of death." It was a state, not *in* which he hoped to be saved, but *from* which he sought to be delivered. It was a state, in a word, of bitterness and terror, drawing from him expressions of the deepest anguish and distress: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

SERMON XXVII.

EVIL PROPENSITIES ENCOUNTERED BY THE AID OF THE SPIRIT.

(PART II.)

ROMANS, vii. 24.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

HE who has not felt the weakness of his nature, it is probable has reflected little upon the subject of religion. I should conjecture this to be the case.

But then, when men do feel the weakness of their nature, it is not always that this consciousness carries them into a right course; but sometimes into a course the very contrary of what is right. They may see in it, as hath been observed, and many

do see in it, nothing but an excuse and apology for their sins. Since it is acknowledged, that we carry about with us a frail, not to call it a depraved, corrupted nature, surely, they say, we shall not be amenable to any severities, or extremities of judgment, for delinquencies, to which such a nature must ever be liable; or, which is indeed all the difference there is between one man and another, for greater degrees or less, for more or fewer of these delinquencies. The natural man takes courage from this consideration. He finds ease in it. It is an opiate to his fears. It lulls him into a forgetfulness of danger, and of the dreadful end, if the danger be real. Then the practical consequence is, that he begins to relax even of those endeavours to obey God which he has hitherto exerted. Imperfect and inconstant as these endeavours were at best, they become gradually more languid and more unfrequent, and more insincere than they were before. His sins increase upon him in the same proportion: he proceeds rapidly to the condition of a confirmed sinner, either secret or open, it makes no difference, as

to his salvation. And this descent into the depths of moral vileness and depravity began in some measure, with perceiving and confessing the weakness of his nature; and giving to this perception that most erroneous, that most fatal turn, the regarding it as an excuse for every thing; and as dispensing even with the self-denials, and with the exertions of self-government, which a man had formerly thought it necessary to exercise, and in some sort, though in no sufficient sort, had exercised.

Now, I ask, was this *St. Paul's* way of considering the subject? Was this the turn which *he* gave to it? Altogether the contrary. It was impossible for any Christian of any age, to be more deeply impressed with the sense of the weakness of human nature than he was; or to express it more strongly than he has done in the chapter before us. But observe; feeling most sensibly, and painting most forcibly, the sad condition of his nature, he never alleges it as an excuse for sin; he does not console himself with any such excuse. He does not make it a reason for setting himself at rest

upon the subject. He finds no relief to his fears in any such consideration. It is not with him a ground for expecting salvation; on the contrary, he sees it to be a state not leading to salvation; otherwise, why did he seek so earnestly to be delivered from it?

And how to be delivered? that becomes the next question. In order to arrive at St. Paul's meaning in this matter, we must attend with some degree of care, not only to the text, but to the words which follow it. The 24th verse contains the question, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" and then the 25th verse goes on, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Now there is good reason to believe that this 25th verse does not appear in our copies as it ought to be read. It is most probable that the passage stood thus: the 24th verse asks, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Then the 25th verse answers, "The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Instead of the words "I thank God," put the words "The grace of God," and you

will find the sense cleared up by the change very much. I say it is highly probable that this change exhibits what St. Paul really wrote. In English there is no resemblance either in sound or writing between the two sentences, "I thank God," and "The grace of God;" but in the language in which the epistle was written there is a very great resemblance. And, as I have said, there is reason to believe, that in the transcribing one has been confounded with the other. Perhaps the substantial meaning may be the same which ever way you read the passage; but what is implied only in one way, is clearly expressed in the other way.

The question, then, which St. Paul so earnestly and devoutly asks, is, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" from the state of soul which I feel, and which can only lead to final perdition? And the answer to the question is, "The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Can a more weighty question be asked? Can an answer be given which better deserves to be thoroughly considered?

The question is, "Who shall deliver us?" The answer: "The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The "grace of God" means the favour of God. At present, therefore, the answer stands in general terms. We are only informed, that we are rescued from this state of moral difficulty, of deep religious distress, by the favour of God, through Jesus Christ. It remains to be gathered, from what follows, in what particularly this grace or favour consists. St. Paul having asked the question, and given the answer in general terms, proceeds to enlarge upon the answer in these words: "There is therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." There is now no condemnation; but of whom, and to whom, is this spoken? It is to them who first are in Christ Jesus; who secondly walk not after the flesh; who thirdly walk after the Spirit.

And whence arises this alteration and improvement in our condition and our hopes; this exemption or rather deliver-

ance, from the ordinary state of man? St. Paul refers us to the cause. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Which words can hardly bear any other signification than this, *viz.* "that the aid and operation of God's Spirit, given through Jesus Christ has subdued the power which sin had obtained and once exercised over me." With this interpretation the whole sequel of St. Paul's reasoning agrees. Every sentence almost that follows, illustrates the interpretation, and proves it to be the true one. With what, but with the operation and the co-operation of the Spirit of God, as of a real, efficient, powerful, active Being, can such expressions as the following be made to suit? "If so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you." "By his Spirit that dwelleth in you." "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption." "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit." All which expressions are found in the eighth chapter,

namely, the chapter following the text, and all, indeed, within the compass of a few verses. These passages either assert or assume the fact, namely, the existence and agency of such a Spirit; its agency I mean, in and upon the human soul. It is by the aid, therefore, of this Spirit, that the deliverance so earnestly sought for is effected; a deliverance represented as absolutely necessary to be effected in some way or other. And it is also represented as one of the grand benefits of the Christian dispensation. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Which passage I expound thus: a mere law, that is, a rule merely telling us what we ought to do, without enabling us, or affording us any help or aid in doing it, is not calculated for such a nature as ours: "it is weak through the flesh?" it is ineffectual by reason of our natural infirmities. Then what the law, or a mere

rule of rectitude (for that is what any law, as such is), could not do, was done under the Christian dispensation. And how done? The righteousness of the law, that is, the righteousness which the law dictated, and which it aimed as far as it could, to procure and produce, is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; is actually produced and procured in us, who live under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit. By this Holy Spirit we have that assistance which the law could not impart; and without which, as a mere rule, though ever so good and right a rule, it was weak and insufficient, forasmuch as it had not force or strength sufficient to produce obedience in those who acknowledged its authority.

To communicate this so much wanted assistance was one end and effect of Christ's coming. So it is intimated by St. Paul, "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did;" that is, God "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin," namely, sending him by reason or on ac-

count of sin, condemned sin in the flesh ;" vouchsafed, that is, spiritual aid and ability, by which aid and ability, sin and the power of sin might be effectually opposed, encountered and repelled.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE AID OF THE SPIRIT TO BE SOUGHT AND PRESERVED BY PRAYER.

(PART III.)

ROMANS, vii. 24.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

IF it be doctrinally true, that man in his ordinary state, in that state, at least, in which great numbers find themselves, is in a deplorable condition, a condition which ought to be a subject to him of great and bitter lamentation, *viz.* that his moral powers are ineffectual for his duty; able, perhaps, on most occasions, to perceive and approve of the rule of right; able, perhaps, to will it: able, perhaps, to set on foot unsuccessful, frustrated, and defeated

endeavours after that will, but by no means able to pursue or execute it: — if it be also true, that strength and assistance may and can be communicated to this feeble nature, and that it is by the action of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, that it is so communicated: that with this aid and assistance sin may be successfully encountered, and such a course of duty maintained as may render us accepted in Christ: and further, that to impart the above described assistance is one of the ends of Christ's coming, and one of the operations of his love towards mankind: — if, I say, these propositions be doctrinally true, then follow from them these three practical rules: first, that we are to pray sincerely, earnestly, and incessantly for this assistance; secondly, that by so doing we are to obtain it; thirdly, that being obtained, we are to yield ourselves to its agency, to be obedient to its dictates.

First; we are to pray sincerely, earnestly, and incessantly, for this assistance. A fundamental, and, as it seems to me, an unsurmountable text, upon this head, is

our Saviour's declaration: Luke, xi. 13. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" This declaration, besides expressing (which was its primary object) God's benignant, prompt, and merciful disposition towards us: which here, as in other places, our Saviour compares with the disposition of a parent towards his children; besides this, the text undoubtedly assumes the fact of there being a Holy Spirit, of its being the gift of God, of its being given to them that ask him; that these things are all realities; a real spiritual assistance, really given, and given to prayer. But let it be well observed, that whensoever the Scripture speaks of prayer, whensoever it uses that term, or other terms equivalent to it, it means prayer, sincere and earnest, in the full and proper sense of these words, prayer proceeding from the heart and soul. It does not mean any particular form of words whatever; it does not mean any service of the lips, any utterance or pronunciation of prayer, merely as such; but supplication

actually and truly proceeding from the heart. Prayer may be solemn without being sincere. Every decency, every propriety, every visible mark and token of prayer may be present, yet the heart not engaged. This is the requisite which must make prayer availing; this is the requisite indeed which must make it that which the Scripture means whenever it speaks of prayer. Every outward act of worship, without this participation of the heart, fails; not because men do not pray sincerely, but because, in Scripture sense, they do not pray at all.

If these qualities of internal seriousness and impression belong to prayer, whenever prayer is mentioned in Scripture, they seem more peculiarly essential in a case, and for a blessing, purely and strictly spiritual. We must pray with the Spirit, at least when we pray for spiritual succour.

Furthermore; there is good authority in Scripture, which it would carry us too widely from our subject to state at pre-

sent, for persevering in prayer even when long and successful. *Perseverance* in unsuccessful prayer is one of the doctrines and of the lessons of the New Testament.

But again; we must pray for the Spirit earnestly; I mean with a degree of earnestness proportioned to the magnitude of the request. The earnestness with which we pray will always be in proportion to our sense, knowledge, and consciousness of the importance of the thing which we ask. This consciousness is the source and principle of earnestness in prayer; and in this, I fear, we are greatly deficient. We do not possess or feel it in the manner in which we ought: and we are deficient upon the subject of spiritual assistance most particularly. I fear that many understand and reflect little upon the importance of what they are about, upon the exceedingly great consequence of what they are asking, when they pray to God, as we do in our liturgy, "to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit;" "to make clean our hearts within us;" "not to take his Holy Spirit from us;" "to give us increase

of grace;" "to grant that his Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts."

These are momentous petitions, little as we may perceive or think, or account of them, at the time. It has been truly said, that we are hardly ever certain of praying aright, except when we pray for the Spirit of God. When we pray for temporal blessings, we do not know, though God does, whether we ask what is really for our good: when we ask for the assistance and sanctification of God's Spirit in the work and warfare of religion, we ask for that which by its very nature is good, and which, without our great fault, will be good to us.

But secondly: we must obtain it. God is propitious. You hear that He has promised it to prayer; to prayer really and truly such; to prayer, namely, issuing from the heart and soul; for no other is ever meant. We are suppliants to our Maker for various and continual blessings; for health, for ease; it may be, for prosperity and success. There is, as hath already been observed,

some degree of uncertainty in all these cases, whether we ask what is fit and proper to be granted; or even what, if granted, would do us good. There is this, likewise, further to be observed, that they are what, if such be the pleasure of God, we can do without. But how incapable we are of doing without God's Spirit, of proceeding in our spiritual course upon our own strength and our own resources, of finally accomplishing the work of salvation without it, the strong description which is given by St. Paul, may convince us, if our own experience had not convinced us before. Many of us, a large majority of us, either require, or have required, a great change, a moral regeneration. This is to be effectuated by the aid of God's Spirit. Vitiated hearts will not change themselves; not easily, not frequently, not naturally, perhaps not possibly. Yet, "without holiness no man shall see God." How then are the unholy to become holy. *Holiness* is a thing of the heart and soul. It is not a few forced, constrained actions, though good as actions, which constitute holiness. It must reside within us: it is a disposition

of soul. To acquire, therefore, that which is not yet acquired, to change that which is not yet changed, to go to the root of the malady, to cleanse and purify the *inside* of the cup, the foulness of our mind, is a work of the Spirit of God within us. Nay, more; many, as the Scripture most significantly expresses it, are *dead* in sins and trespasses, not only committing sins and trespasses, but dead in them: that is, as insensible of their condition under them, as a dead man is insensible of his condition. Where this is the case, the sinner must, in the first instance, be roused and quickened to a sense of his condition; of his danger, his fate: in a word, he must by some means or other, be brought to feel a strong compunction. This is also an office for the Spirit of God. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:" Eph. ii. 1. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light:" Eph. v. 14. Whether, therefore, we be amongst the dead in sin; or whether we be of the number of those, with whom, according to St. Paul's description, to *will* is present, but how to perform that which is good they find not; who, though

they approve the law of God, nay delight in it, after the inward man, that is, in the answers of their conscience, are, nevertheless, *brought into captivity* to the law of sin, which is in their members; carnal, sold under sin; doing what they allow not, what they hate; doing not the good which they would, but the evil which they would not: whichever of these be our wretched estate, for such the apostle pronounces it to be, the grace and influence of God's Spirit must be obtained, in order to rescue and deliver us from it: and the sense of this want and of this necessity lies at the root of our devotions, when directed to this object.

To those who are in a better state than what has been here described, little need be said, because the very supposition of their being in a better state includes that earnest and devout application by prayer for the continual aid, presence, and indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, which we state to be a duty of the Christian religion.

But thirdly, the assistance of God's Spirit being obtained, we are to yield ourselves to

its direction; to consult, attend, and listen to its dictates, suggested to us through the admonitions of our conscience. The terms of Scripture represent the Spirit of God as an assisting, not a forcing power; as not suspending our own powers, but enabling them; as imparting strength and faculty for our religious work, if we will use them; but whether we will use them or not, still depending upon ourselves. Agreeably hereunto St. Paul, you have heard, asserts, that there is no condemnation to them who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The promise is not to them who have the Spirit, but to them who walk after the Spirit. To walk after the flesh, is to follow the impulses of sensuality and selfishness wherever they lead us; which is a voluntary act. To walk after the Spirit, is steadily and resolutely to obey good motions within us, whatever they cost us; which also is a voluntary act. All the language of this remarkable chapter (Rom. vii.) proceeds in the same strain; namely, that after the Spirit of God is given, it remains and rests with ourselves whether we avail ourselves of it or not. "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh ye

shall live." It is through the Spirit that we are enabled to mortify the deeds of the flesh. But still, whether we mortify them or not, it is our act, because it is made a subject of precept and exhortation so to do. Health is God's gift: but what use we will make of it, is our choice. Bodily strength is God's gift: but of what advantage it shall be to us, depends upon ourselves. Even so, the higher gift of the Spirit remains a gift, the value of which will be exceedingly great, will be little, will be none, will be even an increase of guilt and condemnation, according as it is applied and obeyed, or neglected and withstood. The fourth chapter of Ephesians, verse 30, is a warning voice upon this subject. "Grieve not the Spirit of God:" therefore he may be grieved: being given, he may be rejected; rejected, he may be withdrawn.

St. Paul (Rom. viii.) represents the gift and possession of the Spirit in these words: "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you:" and its efficacy, where it is efficacious, in the following magnificent terms: "If the Spirit of him that raised Christ from the dead

dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." What, nevertheless, is the practical inference therefrom stated in the very next words? "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live after the flesh, for if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die:" consequently it is still possible, and plainly conceived, and supposed, and stated to be so, even after this communication of the Spirit, to live, notwithstanding, according to the flesh: and still true, that, if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die. "We are debtors;" our obligation, our duty imposed upon us by this gift of the Spirit, is no longer to live after the flesh; but on the contrary, through the Spirit so given, to do that which, without it, we could not have done, to "mortify the deeds of the body." Thus following the suggestions of the Spirit, ye shall live: for "as many as are led by the Spirit of God," as many as yield themselves to its guidance and direction, "they are the sons of God."

To conclude the subject. The difference between those who succeed, and those who

fail in their Christian course, between those who attain, and those who do not attain salvation is this: They may both feel equally the weakness of their nature, the existence and the power of evil propensities within them; but the former, by praying with their whole heart and soul, and that perseveringly, for spiritual assistance, obtain it; and, by the aid so obtained, are enabled to withstand, and do, in fact, withstand their evil propensites; the latter sink under them. I will not say that all are comprised under this description; for neither are all included in St. Paul's account of the matter, from which our discourse set out; but I think that it represents the general condition of Christians, as to their spiritual state, and that the greatest part of those who read this discourse, will find that they belong to one side or other of the alternative here stated.

SERMON XXXI.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CANAANITES.

JOSHUA, X. 40.

So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded.

I HAVE known serious and well disposed Christians much affected with the accounts, which are delivered in the Old Testament, of the Jewish wars and dealings with the inhabitants of Canaan. From the Israelites first setting foot in that country, to their complete establishment in it, which takes up the whole book of Joshua, and part

of the book of Judges, we read, it must be confessed of massacres and desolation unlike what are practised now a-days between nations at war, of cities and districts laid waste, of the inhabitants being totally destroyed, and this, as it is alleged, in the history, by the authority and command of Almighty God. Some have been induced to think such accounts incredible, inasmuch as such conduct could never, they say, be authorized by the good, and merciful Governor of the universe.

I intend in the following discourse to consider this matter, so far as to show, that these transactions were calculated for a beneficial purpose, and for the general advantage of mankind; and, being so calculated, were not inconsistent either with the justice of God, or with the usual proceedings of divine Providence.

Now the first and chief thing to be observed is, that the nations of Canaan were destroyed for their wickedness. In proof of this point, I produce the 18th chapter of Leviticus, the 24th and the following

verses. Moses, in this chapter, after laying down prohibitions against brutal and abominable vices, proceeds in the 24th verse thus — "Defile not yourselves in any of these things, for in all these the nations are defiled, which I cast out before you, and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: for all these abominations have the men of the land done which were before you, and the land is defiled; that the land vomit not you out also, when ye defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from amongst their people. Therefore shall ye keep my ordinances that ye commit not any of these abominable customs, which were committed before you; and that you defile not yourselves therein." Now the facts disclosed in this passage

are for our present purpose extremely material and extremely satisfactory. First, the passage testifies the principal point, namely, that the Canaanites were the wicked people we represent them to be; and that this point does not rest upon supposition, but upon proof: in particular, the following words contain an express assertion of the guilt of that people. "In all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you; for all these abominations have the men of the land done." Secondly, the form and turn of expression seems to show, that these detestable practices were general amongst them, and habitual: they are said to be abominable *customs* which were committed. Now the word custom is not applicable to a few single, or extraordinary instances, but to usage and to national character; which argues, that not only the practice, but the sense and notion of morality was corrupted amongst them, or lost. And it is observable, that these practices, so far from being checked by their religion, formed a part of it. They are described not only under the name of abominations, but of

abominations which they have done unto their gods. What a state of national morals must that have been! Thirdly, The passage before us positively and directly asserts, that it was for these sins that the nations of Canaan were destroyed. This, in my judgment, is the important part of the inquiry. And what do the words under consideration declare? "In all these," namely, the odious and brutal vices, which had been spoken of, "the nations are defiled, which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled; *therefore* I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it." This is the reason and cause of the calamities which I bring on it. The land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. The very land is sick of its inhabitants; of their odious and brutal practices; of their corruption and wickedness. This, and no other, was the reason for destroying them. This, and no other, is the reason here alledged. It was not, as hath been imagined, to make way for the Israelites: nor was it simply for their idolatry.

It appears to me extremely proba-

ble, that idolatry in those times led, in all countries, to the vices here described: and also that the detestation, threats, and severities, expressed against idolatry in the Old Testament, were not against idolatry simply, or considered as an erroneous religion, but against the abominable crimes which usually accompanied it. I think it quite certain, that the case was so in the nations of Canaan. Fourthly, It appears from the passage before us, and what is surely of great consequence to the question, that God's abhorrence and God's treatment of these crimes were impartial, without distinction, and without respect of nations or persons. The words which point out the divine impartiality, are those in which Moses warns the Israelites against falling into any of the like wicked courses; "that the land," says he, "cast not you out also, when you defile it, as it cast out the nations that were before you; for whoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them, shall be cut off from among their people." The Jews are sometimes called the chosen and favoured people of God, and, in a

certain sense, and for some purposes, they were so; yet is this very people, both in this place, and in other places, over and over again reminded, that if they followed the same practices, they must expect the same fate. "Ye shall not walk in the way of the nations which I cast out before you: for they committed all those things, and therefore I abhorred them; as the nations which the Lord destroyed before your face, so shall ye perish: because ye were not obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God."

What farther proves not only the justice but the clemency of God, his long-suffering, and that it was the incorrigible wickedness of those nations, which at last drew down upon them their destruction, is, that he suspended as we may so say, the stroke, till their wickedness was come to such a pitch, that they were no longer to be endured. In the 15th chapter of Genesis God tells Abraham, that his descendants of the fourth generation should return into that country, and not before: "for the iniquity," saith he, "of the Amorites

is not yet full." It should seem from hence, that so long as their crimes were confined within any bounds, they were permitted to remain in their country. We conclude, therefore, and we are well warranted in concluding, that the Canaanites were destroyed on account of their wickedness. And that wickedness was perhaps aggravated by their having had amongst them Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; examples of a purer religion and a better conduct: still more by the judgments of God, so remarkably set before them in the history of Abraham's family; particularly by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. At least these things prove that they were not without warning, and that God did not leave himself without witness among them.

Now, when God, for the wickedness of a people, sends an earthquake, or a fire, or a plague amongst them, there is no complaint of injustice, especially when the calamity is known, or expressly declared beforehand, to be inflicted for the wickedness of such people. It is rather regarded

as an act of exemplary penal justice, and, as such consistent with the character of the moral governor of the universe. The objection, therefore, is not to the Canaanitish nations being destroyed (for when their national wickedness is considered, and when that is expressly stated as the cause of their destruction, the dispensation, however severe, will not be questioned); but the objection is solely to the manner of destroying them. I mean there is nothing but the manner left to be objected to: their wickedness accounts for the thing itself. To which objection it may be replied, that if the thing itself be just, the manner is of little signification: of little signification even to the sufferers themselves. For where is the great difference, even to them, whether they were destroyed by an earthquake, a pestilence, a famine, or by the hands of an enemy? Where is the difference, even to our imperfect apprehensions of divine justice, provided it be, and is known to be, for their wickedness that they are destroyed? but this destruction, you say, confounded the innocent with the guilty. The sword of Joshua, and of the Jews, spared neither

women nor children. Is it not the same with all other national visitations? Would not an earthquake, or a fire, or a plague, or a famine amongst them have done the same? Even in an ordinary and natural death the same thing happens. God takes away the life he lends, without regard that we can perceive, to age or sex, or character. But, after all, promiscuous massacres, the burning of cities, the laying waste of countries, are things dreadful to reflect upon. Who doubts it? so are all the judgments of Almighty God. The effect, in whatever way it shows itself, must necessarily be tremendous, when the Lord, as the Psalmist expresses it, "moveth out of his place to punish the wicked." But it ought to satisfy us; at least this is the point upon which we ought to rest and fix our attention; that it was for excessive, wilful, and fore-warned wickedness, that all this befel them, and that it is all along so declared in the history which recites it.

But, further; if punishing them by the hands of the Israelites rather than by a pestilence, an earthquake, a fire, or any

such calamity, be still an objection, we may perceive, I think, some reasons for this method of punishment in preference to any other whatever: always, however, bearing in our mind, that the question is not concerning the justice of the punishment, but the mode of it. It is well known, that the people of those ages were affected by no proof of the power of the gods which they worshipped so deeply, as by their giving them victory in war. It was by this species of evidence that the superiority of their own gods above the gods of the nations which they conquered, was, in their opinion, evinced. This being the actual persuasion which then prevailed in the world, no matter whether well or ill founded, how were the neighbouring nations, for whose admonition this dreadful example was intended, how were they to be convinced of the supreme power of the God of Israel above the pretended gods of other nations, and of the righteous character of Jehovah, that is, of his abhorrence of the vices which prevailed in the land of Canaan: how, I say, were they to be convinced so well, or at all indeed, as by

enabling the Israelites, whose God he was known and acknowledged to be, to conquer under his banner, and drive out before them, those who resisted the execution of that commission with which the Israelites declared themselves to be invested, *viz.* the expulsion and extermination of the Canaanitish nations? This convinced surrounding countries, and all who were observers or spectators of what passed, first, that the God of Israel was a real God: secondly, that the gods which other nations worshipped were either no gods, or had no power against the God of Israel: and thirdly, that it was he, and he alone, who possessed both the power and the will, to punish, to destroy, and to exterminate, from before his face, both nations and individuals, who gave themselves up to the crimes and wickedness for which the Canaanites were notorious. Nothing of this sort would have appeared, or with the same evidence however, from an earthquake, or a plague, or any natural calamity. These might not have been attributed to divine agency at all, or not to the interposition of the God of Israel.

Another reason, which made this destruction both more necessary, and more general, than it would have otherwise been, was the consideration, that if any of the old inhabitants were left, they would prove a snare to those who succeeded them in the country; would draw and seduce them by degrees into the vices and corruptions which prevailed amongst themselves. Vices of all kinds, but vices most particularly of the licentious kind, are astonishingly infectious. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. A small number of persons addicted to them and allowed to practise them with impunity or encouragement, will spread them through the whole mass. This reason is formally and expressly assigned, not simply for the punishment, but for the extent to which it was carried: namely, extermination, "Thou shalt *utterly* destroy them, that they teach you not to do after all their abominations which they have done unto their gods."

To conclude; In reading the Old Testament account of the Jewish wars and conquests in Canaan, and the terrible de-

struction brought upon the inhabitants thereof, we are constantly to bear in our minds that we are reading the execution of a dreadful, but just sentence, pronounced by God against the intolerable and incorrigible crimes of these nations — that they were intended to be made an example to the whole world of God's avenging wrath against sins of this magnitude, and of this kind: sins, which, if they had been suffered to continue, might have polluted the whole ancient world, and which could only be checked by the signal and public overthrow of nations notoriously addicted to them, and so addicted, as to have incorporated them even into their religion and their public institutions: that the miseries inflicted upon the nations by the invasion of the Jews, were expressly declared to be inflicted on account of their abominable sins: that God had borne with them long: that God did not proceed to execute his judgments till their wickedness was full: that the Israelites were mere instruments in the hands of a righteous Providence for the effectuating the extermination of a people whom it was necessary to make a public example to the rest of mankind:

that this extermination, which might have been accomplished by a pestilence, by fire, by earthquakes, was appointed to be done by the hands of the Israelites, as being the clearest and most intelligible method of displaying the power and righteousness of the God of Israel; his power over the pretended gods of other nations, and his righteous hatred of the crimes into which they were fallen.

This is the true statement of the case. It is no forced, or invented construction, but the idea of the transaction set forth in Scripture; and it is an idea, which, if retained in our thoughts, may fairly, I think, reconcile us to every thing which we read in the Old Testament concerning it.

SERMON XXX.

NEGLECT OF WARNINGS.

DEUT. XXXII. 29.

Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!

THERE is one great sin, which, nevertheless, may not be amongst the number of those of which we are sensible, and of which our consciences accuse us: and that sin is the neglect of warnings.

It is our duty to consider this life throughout as a probationary state: nor do we ever think truly, or act rightly, but so long as we have this consideration fully before our eyes. Now one character of a state, suited to qualify and prepare rational and im-

proveable creatures for a better state, consists in the warnings which it is constantly giving them; and the providence of God, by placing *us* in such a state, becomes the author of these warnings. It is his paternal care which admonishes us by and through the events of life and death that pass before us. Therefore it is a sin against Providence to neglect them. It is hardiness and determination in sin: or it is blindness, which in whole or in part is wilful; or it is giddiness and levity, and contemptuousness in a subject which admits not of these dispositions towards it, without great offence to God.

A serious man hardly ever passes a day, never a week, without meeting with some warning to his conscience; without something to call to his mind his situation with respect to his future life. And these warnings, as perhaps was proper, come the thicker upon us, the farther we advance in life. The dropping into the grave of our acquaintance, and friends, and relations, what can be better calculated, not to prove (for we do not want the point to

be proved), but to possess our hearts with a complete sense and perception of the extreme peril and hourly precariousness of our condition; namely to teach this momentous lesson, that when we preach to you concerning heaven and hell, we are not preaching concerning things at a distance, things remote, things long before they come to pass; but concerning things near, soon to be decided, in a very short time to be fixed one way or the other? This is a truth of which we are warned by the course of mortality; yet, with this truth confessed, with these warnings before us, we venture upon sin. But it will be said, that the events which ought to warn us, are out of our mind at the time. But this is not so. Were it that these things came to pass in the wide world only at large, it might be that we should seldom hear of them, or soon forget them. But the events take place where we ourselves are; within our own doors; in our own families; amongst those with whom we have the most constant correspondence, the closest intimacy, the strictest connection. It is impossible to say that such events can be out of our

mind; nor is it the fact. The fact is, that, knowing them, we act in defiance of them; which is neglecting warnings in the worst sense possible. It aggravates the daringness; it aggravates the despenateness of sin: but it is so nevertheless. Supposing these warnings to be sent by Providence, or that we believe, and have reason to believe, and ought to believe that they are so sent, then the aggravation is very great.

We have warnings of every kind. Even youth itself is continually warned, that there is no reliance to be placed either on strength, or constitution, or early age: that, if they count upon life as a thing to be reckoned secure for a considerable number of years, they calculate most falsely; and if they act upon this calculation, by allowing themselves in the vices which are incidental to their years, under a notion that it will be long before they shall have to answer for them, and before that time come they shall have abundant season for repenting and amending; if they suffer such arguments to enter into their minds,

and act upon them, then are they guilty of neglecting God in his warnings. They not only err in point of just reasoning, but they neglect the warnings which God has expressly set before them. Or, if they take upon themselves to consider religion as a thing not made or calculated for them; as much too serious for their years; as made and intended for the old and the dying: at least as what is unnecessary to be entered upon at present, as what may be postponed to a more suitable time of life; whenever they think thus, they think very presumptuously. They are justly chargeable with neglecting warnings. And what is the event? These postponers never enter upon religion at all, in earnest or effectually. That is the end and event of the matter. To account for this, shall we say, that they have so offended God by neglecting his warnings, as to have forfeited his grace? Certainly we may say that this is not the method of obtaining his grace, and that his grace is necessary to our conversion. Neglecting warnings is not the way to obtain God's grace; and God's grace is necessary to conversion. The

young, I repeat again, want not warnings. Is it new? is it unheard of? is it not, on the contrary, the intelligence of every week, the experience of every neighbourhood, that young men and young women are cut off? Man is, in every sense, a flower of the field. The flower is liable to be cut down in its bloom and perfection, as well as in its withering and its decays. So is man: and one probable cause of this ordination of Providence is, that no one of any age may be so confident of life as to allow himself to transgress God's laws; that all of every age may live in constant awe of their Maker.

I do admit, that warnings come the thicker upon us, as we grow old. We have more admonitions both in our remembrances, and in our observations, and of more kinds. A man, who has passed a long life, has to remember preservations from danger, which ought to inspire him both with thankfulness and caution. Yet I fear we are very deficient in both these qualities. We call our preservations escapes, not preservations, and so we see

no thankfulness for them: nor do we turn them into religious cautions. When God preserved us, he meant to warn us. When such instances, therefore, have no effect upon our minds, we are guilty before God of neglecting his warnings. Most especially if we have occasion to add to all other reasons for gratitude this momentous question, What would have become of us, what would have been our condition, if we had perished in the danger by which our lives were threatened? The parable of the fig-tree (Luke, xiii. verse 6.) is a most apt Scripture for persons under the circumstances we have described. When the Lord had said, "cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?" he was entreated to try it one year longer; and then, if it proved not fruitful, to cut it down. Christ himself there makes the application twice over (verses 3d and 5th), "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." If the present, or if the then, state of our conscience and of our souls call up this reflection, then are we very guilty indeed, if such preservations leave no religious impression upon us: or if we suffer the temporary impression to pass off without producing in us a change for the better.

Infirmities, whether they be of health, or of age, decay, and weakness, are warnings. And it has been asked, with some degree of wonder, why they make so little impression as they do? One chief reason is this? they who have waited for warnings of this kind before they would be converted, have generally waited until they are become hardened in sin. Their habits are fixed. Their character has taken its shape and form. Their disposition is thoroughly infected and invested with sin. When it is come to this case, it is difficult for any call to be heard; for any warning to operate. It is difficult; but "with God all things are possible." If there be the will and the sincere endeavour to reform, the grace of God can give the power. Although, therefore, they who wait for the advances of age, the perception of decay, the probable approach of death, before they turn themselves seriously to religion, have waited much too long, have neglected, and despised, and defied many solemn warnings in the course of their lives; have waited indeed till it be next to impossible that they turn at all from their former ways: yet this is not a reason why

they should continue in neglect of the warnings which now press upon them; and which at length they begin to perceive; but just the contrary. The effort is greater, but the necessity is greater. It is their last hope, and their last trial. I put the case of a man grown old in sin. If the warnings of old age bring him round to religion, happy is that man in his old age, above any thing he was in any other part of his life. But if these warnings do not affect him, there is nothing left in this world which will. We are not to set limits to God's grace, operating according to his good pleasure; but we say there is nothing *in this world;* there is nothing in the course of nature, and the order of human affairs, which will affect him, if the feelings of age do not. I put the case of a man grown old in sin, and, though old, continuing the practice of sin: that, it is said, in the full latitude of the expression, describes a worse case than is commonly met with. Would to God that the case was more rare than it is? But allowing it to be unusual in the utmost extent of the terms; in a certain considerable degree the description applies to many old persons. Many feel in their hearts, that

the words "grown old in sin," belong to them in some sense which is very formidable. They feel some dross and defilement to be yet purged away: some deep corruption to be yet eradicated, some virtue or other to be yet even learnt, yet acquired, or yet however, to be brought nearer to what it ought to be, than it has hitherto been brought. Now, if the warnings of age taught us nothing else, they might teach us this: that if these things are to be done, they must be done soon; they must be set about forthwith, in good earnest, and with strong resolution. The work is most momentous; the time is short. The day is far spent; the evening is come on; the night is at hand.

Lastly, I conceive that this discourse points out the true and only way of making old age comfortable; and that is by making it the means of religious improvement. Let a man be beset by ever so many bodily complaints, bowed down by ever so many infirmities; if he find his soul grown and growing better, his seriousness increased, his obedience more regular and more exact, his inward principles and dispositions improved from what they

were formerly, and continuing to improve; that man hath a fountain of comfort and consolation springing up within him. Infirmities, which have this effect, are infinitely better than strength and health themselves; though these, considered independently of their consequences, be justly esteemed the greatest of all blessings, and of all gifts. The old age of a virtuous man admits of a different and of a most consoling description.

It is this property of old age, namely, that its proper and most rational comfort consists in the consciousness of spiritual amendment. A very pious writer gives the following representation of this stage of human life, when employed and occupied as it ought to be, and when life has been drawn to its close by a course of virtue and religion; "To the intelligent and virtuous," says our author, "old age presents a scene of tranquil enjoyments, of obedient appetites, of well-regulated affections, of maturity in knowledge, and of calm preparation for immortality. In this serene and dignified state, placed, as it were, on the confines of two worlds, the mind of a

good man reviews what is past with the complacency of an approving conscience, and looks forward with humble confidence in the mercy of God, and with devout aspirations towards his eternal and ever increasing favour."

SERMON XXXI.

THE TERRORS OF THE LORD.

MATT. xvi. 26.

What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

THESE words ask a question, the most home to every man's concern of any that can possibly enter into his thoughts. What our Saviour meant to assert, though proposed to his hearers in the form of a question (which indeed was only a stronger and more affecting way of asserting it), is, that a man's soul, by which term is here meant his state after death, is so infinitely more important to him, so beyond and above any thing he can get, or any thing he can lose, any thing he can enjoy, or any thing

he can suffer, on this side the grave, that nothing which the world offers can make up for the loss of it, or be a compensation when that is at stake. You say that this is very evident; I reply, that evident as it is, it is not thought of, it is not considered, it is not believed. The subject, therefore, is very proper to be set forth in those strong and plain terms which such a subject requires, for the purpose of obtaining for it some degree of that attention which each man's own deep interest in the event demands of him to give it.

There are two momentous ideas which are included in the expression, the loss of a man's soul; and these are the positive pain and sufferings which he will incur after his death: and the happiness and reward which he will forfeit. Upon both of these points we must go for information to the Scriptures. No where else can we receive any. Now, as to the first point, which is, in other words, *the punishment of hell*, I do admit, that it is very difficult to handle this dreadful subject properly. And

one cause, amongst others, of the difficulty is, that it is not for one poor sinner to denounce such appalling terrors, such tremendous consequences against another. Damnation is a word which lies not in the mouth of man, who is a worm, towards any of his fellow-creatures whatsoever; yet it is absolutely necessary that the threatenings of Almighty God be known and published. Therefore we begin by observing, that the accounts which the Scriptures contain of the punishment of hell, are, for the most part, delivered in figurative or metaphorical terms, that is to say, in terms which represent things of which we have no notion, by a comparison with things of which we have a notion. Therefore take notice what those figures and metaphors are. They are of the most dreadful kind which words can express; and, be they understood how they may, ever so figuratively, it is plain that they convey, and were intended to convey, ideas of horrible torment. They are such as these, "being cast into hell, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched." It is "burning the

chaff with unquenchable fire." It is "going into fire everlasting which is prepared for the devil and his angels." These are heart-appalling expressions; and were undoubtedly intended by the person who used them, (who was no other than our Lord Jesus Christ himself,) to describe terrible endurings; positive actual pains of the most horrible kinds. I have said, that the punishment of hell is thus represented to us in figurative speech. I now say, that, from the nature of things, it could hardly have been represented to us in any other. It is of the very nature of pain, that it cannot be known without being felt. It is impossible to give to any one an exact conception of it without his actually tasting it. Experience alone teaches its acuteness and intensity. For which reason, when it was necessary that the punishment of hell should be set forth in Scripture for our warning, and set forth to terrify us from our sins, it could only be done, as it has been done, by comparing it with sufferings of which we can form a conception, and making use of terms drawn from these

sufferings. When words less figurative, and more direct, but at the same time more general, are adopted, they are not less strong, otherwise than as they are more general. "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." These are St. Paul's words. It is a short sentence, but enough to make the stoutest heart tremble: for though it unfold no particulars, it clearly designates positive torment. The day of judgment itself, so far as it respects the wicked, is expressly called a "day of wrath." The Lord Jesus, as to them, shall be revealed in flaming fire. How terrible a fate it must be to find ourselves at that day the objects of God's wrath, the objects upon whom his threats and judgments against sin are now to be executed, the revelation of his righteous judgment and of his unerring truth to be displayed, may be conceived in some sort, by considering what stores of inexhaustible misery are always in his power. With our present constitutions, if he do but touch the smallest part of our bodies, if a nerve in many places goes

wrong, what torture we endure ! Let any man, who has felt, or rather whilst he is feeling, the agony of some bodily torment, only reflect what a condition that must be, which had to suffer this *continually*, which night and day was to undergo the same, without prospect of cessation or relief; and then ask, for what he would knowingly bring himself into this situation ; what pleasure, what gain would be an inducement ? Let him reflect also, how bitter, how grinding an aggravation of his sufferings as well as of his guilt, it must be, that he has wilfully and forewarned brought all this upon himself. May it not be necessary that God should manifest his truth by executing his threats ? may it not be necessary, that he should at least testify his justice by placing a wide difference between the good and the bad ? between virtue, which he loves, and vice, which he abhors ? which difference must consist in the different state of happiness and of misery in which the good and bad are finally placed. And may we not be made deserved sacrifices to this dispensation ?

Now if any one feel his heart struck with the terrors of the Lord, with the consideration of this dreadful subject, and with the declarations of Scripture relating thereto, which will all have their accomplishment; let him be entreated, let him be admonished, to hold the idea, tremendous as it is, fully in his view, till it has wrought its effect, that is, till it has prevailed with him to part with his sins; and then we assure him, that to alarm, fright, and horror, will succeed peace and hope, and comfort, and joy in the Holy Ghost. There is another way of treating the matter, and that is, to shake off the idea if we can: to drown it in intemperance; to overpower it with worldly business; to fly from it in all directions, but mostly in that which carries us to hurrying tumultuous diversions, to criminal indulgences, or into gross sensuality. Now of this course of proceeding it is certain, that, if it lay the mind in any degree at ease in this life, it is at the expense of the inevitable destruction of our souls in the next; which is enough to say against it: but in truth it answers even its present purpose very imperfectly. It is a

way of getting rid of the matter, with which even we ourselves are not satisfied. We are sensible that it is a false, treacherous, hollow way of acting towards our own souls. We have no trust in what we are doing. It leaves no peace, no hope, no comfort, no joy.

But to return to the direct subject of our discourse. The Scriptures uniformly represent the wicked as not only suffering positive misery, but also as having lost, by their wickedness, the happiness of heaven, and as being sensible of their loss. They are repeatedly described as *cast out*, or as *shut out*, into outer darkness; whilst the good are entering into the joy of their Lord. This imports a knowledge of their own exclusion. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man being in torments, is made to see Lazarus at rest. This teaches us, that the wicked will so far be informed of the state of the good, as to perceive and bewail with unutterable anguish and regret, their own sad fate in being refused and rejected, when, had they acted differently they would have been

admitted to it. This is, strictly speaking, losing a man's soul: it is losing that happiness which his soul might have attained, and for which it was made. And here comes the bitter addition of their calamity, that, being lost, it cannot be recovered. The heaven we hear of in Scripture, and the hell we hear of in Scripture, are a heaven and a hell depending upon our behaviour in this life. So they are all along spoken of. "Indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish, upon every soul of man that *doeth evil*:" meaning evidently the evil done by him in this life; no other evil was in the apostle's thoughts. Or again, more expressly, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." "The things done in the body," are the things taken into the account.

Now, by the side of this immense consequence of saving or of losing our immortal souls, place any difference that the things of this life can make to us; place riches

and poverty, grandeur and humility, success or misfortune; place more especially, the difference between possessing and sacrificing an unlawful gratification; between compassing and renouncing an unjust purpose; making or giving up an unfair gain; in a word, between the pleasures and temptations of vice, and the self-denials of virtue; and what do they amount to? The objects themselves are nothing, when put in competition with heaven and hell. Were it true, which it is not, that real, solid, inward happiness was proportioned either to outward circumstances, or the indulgences of our appetites and passions; that the good things, as they are called, and pleasures of life were as satisfactory to the possessor, as they are, for the most part, deceitful and disappointing; still their duration is nothing. The oldest men, when they cast back their eyes on their past life, see it in a very narrow compass. It appears no more than a small interval cut out of eternal duration, both before and after it; when compared with that duration, as nothing. But we must add to this two other ques-

tions. Can life be counted upon to last to what is called old age? No man, who observes the deaths that take place in his neighbourhood, or amongst his acquaintance, will so compute. Or secondly, do the pleasures of sin last as long as our lives? We may answer *never*: with the single dreadful exception of the sinner being cut off in his prime. Whoever looks for permanent happiness from the pleasures of sin will find himself miserably mistaken. They are short even compared with our short lives; subject to casualties and disasters without number; transitory, not only as the things of this world are transitory, but in a much greater degree. It will be said, however, that though this observation may be true of the pleasures of sin, yet an advantage gained by sin, that is, by unrighteous, unconscientious means, may, nevertheless, remain an advantage as long as we live. This may sometimes be the case; and such advantage may be so long enjoyed, if that can be enjoyed which has a fearful expectation and looking for of judgment annexed to it. But what is the term of that enjoyment compared with the sequel? It is a moment, the twink-

ling of an eye, compared with a day; an hour compared with a year; a single day with a long life. It is less than these; for all these comparisons are short of the truth. Well, therefore, doth our Saviour ask, "What doth a man profit if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" That world, when gained, he could not keep: nor if he could, would it make him happy.

But our Saviour delivered his powerful admonition, not so much for his disciples to reason upon, as to carry into practice; that is, that his words might strike into their souls upon those occasions, (which are but too many,) when the business, the bustle, or the allurements of the world are in danger of shutting out futurity from their thoughts. These are the times for calling to mind our Saviour's question. Whenever, therefore, we are driving on in the career of worldly prosperity; meeting with success after success; fortunate, rich, and flourishing; when every thing appears to thrive and smile around us; but *conscience*, in the mean time, little heeded and attended to; the justice, the integrity,

the uprightness of our ways, and of our dealings, seldom weighed and scrutinized by us; religion very much, or entirely perhaps, out of the question with us; soothed and buoyed up with that self-applause which success naturally begets; in this no very uncommon state of soul, it will be well if we hear our Saviour's voice, asking us, what does all this prosperity signify? if it do not lead to heaven, what is it worth? when the scene is shifted, if nothing but death and darkness remain behind? much more, if God Almighty be all this while offended by our forgetfulness both of his mercies and his laws, our neglect of his service, our indevotion, our thoughtlessness, our disobedience, our love of the world to the exclusion of all consideration of Him; if we be assured, and if, in reality, it be the case, that this displeasure shall infallibly overtake us at our death, what in truth, under all this appearance of advantage, are we getting or gaining? The world may amuse us with names and terms of felicitation, with their praises or their envy, but wherein are we the better in the amount and result of substantial

happiness? We have got our aim, and what is the end of it? Death is preparing to level us with the poorest of mankind; and after that a fearful looking for and expectation of judgment; no well founded hopes of happiness beyond the grave; and we drawing sensibly nearer to that grave every year. This is the sum of the account. Or, which is another case no less apposite to our present argument, is it some sensual pleasure that tempts us, some wicked enjoyment that has taken such hold of our passions, that we are ready to rush upon it, whatever be the consequence. If we gain our object; if we possess our wishes, we are happy: but what if we lose our own souls? What if we find ourselves condemned men, for hardly venturing upon crimes, which will, and which we were forewarned that they would, render us the objects of God's final indignation and displeasure? Will any gratifications which sin affords be a recompense or a consolation? Are they so even for the diseases, shame, and ruin, which they often bring upon men in this world? Ask those who are so ruined or so

diseased. How much less, then for the gnawings of that worm which dieth not; the burnings of that fire which will not be quenched? In hopeless torment will it assuage our sufferings, or mitigate the bitterness of our self-accusation, to know that we have brought ourselves into this state for some transient pleasure, which is gone, lost, and perished for ever? Oh that we had thought of these things before, as we think of them now! that we had not been infidels, as touching our Lord's declaration! that we had believed in him; and that, believing that he had a perfect knowledge of the future fate of mankind, and of the truth of what he taught, we had listened in time to his admonition.

Universally the true occasion for remembering and applying the passage of Scripture before us is, when we are deliberating concerning the conduct we are to pursue, in the contests which arise between temptation and duty, between the flesh and the world, or between both united and our own souls. Be the temptation what it will, either in kind or strength, this is the

thought to be for ever set against it, that if we give way, we give way in exchange for our own souls: that the perdition of the soul is set forth in Scripture in terms most tremendous, but not more tremendous than true: that the sinner, the man involved in unrepented, unforsaken sins, can never know how soon he may be reduced to this state.

SERMON XXXII.

PRESERVATION AND RECOVERY FROM SIN.

TITUS, ii. 11, 12.

For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

THERE are certain particular texts of Scripture which are of inestimable use; for that in a few, short, clear words, they show us the sum of our duty. Such texts ought to be deeply infixed and imprinted upon our memories; to be written indeed, upon our hearts. The text, which I have read to you, is entitled to this distinction. No single sentence that ever was written down for the direction of mankind, comprises

more important truth in less room. The text gives us a rule of life and conduct; and tells us, that to lay down for mankind this rule, and enforce it by the promise of salvation, was a great object of the Gospel being published in the world. The Gospel might include other objects, and answer other purposes; but as far as related to the regulation of life and conduct, this was its object and its purpose. The rule, you hear, is, that, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." We must begin "by *denying* ungodliness and worldly lusts:" which means, that we must resist or break off all sins of licentiousness, debauchery, and intemperance; for these are what are specifically meant by worldly lusts. And these must be *denied*; that is, they must either be withstood in the first instance, or the evil courses into which they have drawn us must be broken off.

When a rule of morals is plain and positive, it is seldom that there is any advantage in enlarging upon the rule itself.

We only weaken it by dilating it. I shall employ therefore, my present discourse in offering such heads of advice as may be likely, by God's blessing, to assist us in rendering obedience to the rule laid down for us; an obedience upon which salvation depends.

First, then, I observe concerning licentious practices, that it is most practicable to be entirely innocent; that it is a more easy thing to withstand them altogether, than it is to set bounds to their indulgence. This is a point not sufficiently understood; though true, it is not believed. Men know not what they are doing when they enter upon vicious courses; what a struggle, what a contest, what misery, what torment they are preparing for themselves. I trust that there is hardly a man or woman living who enters into a course of sin with the design of remaining in it to the end: who can brave the punishment of hell; who intends to die in that state of sure perdition, to which a course of unrepented sin must bring him or her. No, that is not the plan even of the worst, much less of

the generality of mankind. Their plan is to allow themselves to a certain length, and there stop; for a certain time, and then reform; in such and such opportunities and temptations, but in no more. Now to such persons and to such plans, I say this, that it would not have cost them one-tenth of the mortification, pain, and self-denial, to have kept themselves at a distance from sin, that it must and will cost them to break it off: adding the further consideration, that so long as men preserve their innocence, the consciousness of doing what is right, is both the strongest possible support of their resolution, and the most constant source of satisfaction to their thoughts; but that when men once begin to give way to vicious indulgences, another state of things takes place in their breasts. Disturbance at the heart, struggles and defeats, resolutions and relapses, self-reproach and self-condemnation, drive out all quietness and tranquillity of conscience. Peace within is at an end. All is unsettled. Did the young and unexperienced know the truth of this matter; how much easier it is to keep innocency

than to return to it; how great and terrible is the danger that they do not return to it at all: surely they would see, and see in a light strong enough to influence their determination, that to adhere inviolably to the rules of temperance, soberness and chastity, was their safety, their wisdom, their happiness. How many bitter thoughts does the innocent man avoid? Serenity and cheerfulness are his portion. Hope is continually pouring its balm into his soul. His heart is at rest, whilst others are goaded and tortured by the stings of a wounded conscience, the remonstrances and risings up of principles which they cannot forget; perpetually teased by returning temptations, perpetually lamenting defeated resolutions. "There is no peace unto the wicked, saith my God." There is no comfort in such a life as this, let a man's outward circumstances be what they will. Genuine satisfaction of mind is not attainable under the recurring consciousness of being immersed in a course of sin, and the still remaining prevalence of religious principles. Yet either this must be the state of a sinner till he recover again his virtuous

courses, or it must be a state infinitely worse; that is, it must be a state of entire surrender of himself to a life of sin, which will be followed by a death of despair, by ruin final and eternal; by the wrath of God; bythe pains of hell.

But, secondly, in what manner, and by what methods are sins to be broken off? for although the maxim which we have delivered be perfectly and certainly true, namely, that it is ease and happiness to preserve innocence, entirely, compared with what it is to recover our innocence, or even to set bounds to guilt, yet it is a truth which all cannot receive. I do not mean that all will not acknowledge it, for I believe that those will be most ready to give their assent to it, who feel themselves bound and entangled by the chain of their sin. But it is not applicable to every man's case; because many having already fallen into vicious courses, have no longer to consider how much better, how much happier it would have been for them, to have adhered closely to the laws of virtue and religion at first, but how to extricate

themselves from the bad condition in which they are placed at present. Now to expect to break off sin in any manner, without pain and difficulty, is a vain expectation. It is to expect a moral impossibility. Such expectations ought not to be held out, because they are sure to deceive; and because they who act under such encouragement, finding themselves deceived, will never persist in their endeavours to any purpose of actual reformation. All mankind feel a reluctance to part with their sins. It must be so. It arises from the very nature of temptation, by which they are drawn into sin. Feeling then this strong reluctance, it is very natural for men to do what great numbers do, namely, propose to themselves to part with their sins *by degrees;* thinking that they can more easily do it in this way than in any other. It presents to their view a kind of compromise; a temporary hope of enjoying, for the present at least, the criminal pleasures to which they have addicted themselves, or the criminal advantages they are making, together with the expectation of a final reform. I believe, as I have already

said, that this is a course into which great numbers fall; and therefore it becomes a question of very great importance whether it be a safe and successful course or not. What I am speaking of is the trying to break off our sins by degrees. Now, in the first place, it is contrary to principle. A man is supposed to feel the guilt and danger of the practices which he follows. He must be supposed to perceive this, because he is supposed to resolve to quit them. His resolution is founded upon, springs from, this perception. Wherefore I say, that it is in contradiction to principle, to allow ourselves even once more to sin, after we have truly become sensible of the guilt, the danger, and the consequences of it. It is, from that time, known and wilful sin. I own I do not see how the plan of gradually diminishing a sinful habit can be consistent with, or can proceed from, sincere religious principles: for, as to what remains of the habit, it implies an express allowance of ourselves in sin, which is utterly inconsistent with sincerity. Whoever continues in the practice of any one known sin, in defiance of God's commands,

cannot, so continuing, hope to find mercy: but with respect to so much of the habit as is yet allowed by him to remain, he is so continuing, and his continuance is part of his plan. These attempts, therefore, at gradual reformation, do not proceed from a true vital religious principle: which principle, succoured by God's grace, is the only thing that can stand against sin strengthened by habit.

So I should reason upon the case, looking at it in its own nature. The next question is, How is it in fact? Is it in fact better? Is it in experience more successful than from its nature we should expect it to be? Now I am much afraid, that all the proof which can be drawn either from observation, or consciousness, is against it. Of other men we must judge by observation, of ourselves by consciousness. What happens then to gradual reformation? Perpetual relapses, perpetually defeated and weakened resolutions. The principle of resistance is weakened by every relapse. Did the mortification of a defeat incite and quicken men to stronger efforts, it would

be well. But it has a contrary effect; it renders every succeeding exertion more feeble. The checked indulgences, which, in the progress of our fancied amendment, we allow ourselves, are more than sufficient to feed desire, to keep up the force and strength of temptation: nay, perhaps, the temptation acquires more force from the partial curb which we impose upon it. Then while the temptation remains with unabated, or perhaps augmented, strength, our resolution is suffering continual relaxation; our endeavours become unsatisfactory even to ourselves. This miserable struggle cannot be maintained long. Although nothing but persevering in it could save us, we do not persevere. Finding not ease, but difficulty, increased and increasing difficulty, men give up the cause: that is, they try to settle themselves into some mode of thinking which may quiet their consciences and their fears. They fall back to their sins: and when they find their consciences easier, they think their guilt less, whereas it is only their conscience that is become more insensible, their reasoning more treacherous and deceitful. The danger is what it was, or greater; the guilt

is so too. Would to God we could say, that gradual reforms were frequently successful. They are what men often attempt: they are, alas! what men usually fail in.

It is painful to seem to discourage endeavours of any kind after amendment: but it is necessary to advertise men of their danger. If one method of going about an important work be imposing in expectation, and yet, in truth, likely to end in ruin, can any thing be more necessary than to set forth this danger and this consequence plainly? This is precisely the case with gradual reforms. They do not very much alarm our passions; they sooth our consciences. They do not alarm our passions, because the absolute rupture is not to come yet. We are not yet entirely and totally to bid adieu to our pleasures and indulgences, never to enjoy or return to them any more. We only have in view to wean and withdraw ourselves from them by degrees; and this is not so harsh and formidable a resolution as the other. Yet it sooths our consciences. It presents the semblance and appearance of repenting and reforming. It confesses our sense of sin

and danger. It takes up the purpose, it would fain encourage us with the hope, of delivering ourselves from this condition. But what is the result? Feeding in the mean time, and fomenting those passions which are to be controlled and resisted, adding by every instance of giving way to them, fresh force and strength to habits which are to be broken off, our constancy is subdued before our work is accomplished. We continue yielding to the importunity of temptation. We have gained nothing by our miserable endeavour, but the mortification of defeat. Our sins are still repeated. The state of our salvation is where it was. Oh! it is a laborious, a difficult, a painful work, to shake off sin; to change the course of a sinful life; to quit gratifications to which we have been accustomed, because we perceive them to be unlawful gratifications; and to find satisfaction in others which are innocent and virtuous. If in one thing more than another we stand in need of God's holy succour and assistance, of the aid and influence of his blessed Spirit upon our souls, it is in the work of reformation. But can we reasonably expect it whilst we are not sincere? And I say

again, that the plan of gradual reformation is in contradiction to principle, and so far insincere. Is there not reason to believe that this may in some measure account for the failure of these resolutions?

But it will be asked of us, what better plan have we to offer? We answer, to break off our sins *at once*. This is properly to *deny* ungodliness and worldly lusts. This is truly to do, what, according to the apostle, the grace of God teaches us to do. Acting thus, we may pray, we may humbly hope for the assistance of God's Spirit in the work and struggle through which we have to go. And I take upon me to say, that all experience is in favour of this plan, in preference to that of a gradual reform; in favour of it, both with respect to ease and happiness. We do not pretend but that a conflict with desire must be supported, but that great resolution is necessary: yet we teach, that the pain of the effort is lessened by this method as far as it can be lessened at all. Passions *denied*, firmly denied and resisted, and not kept up by occasional indulgences, lose their power of tormenting. Habits, absolutely and totally disused, lose their hold. It is

the nature of man. They then leave us at liberty to seek and to find happiness elsewhere, in better things; to enjoy, as well as to practise, virtue; to draw comfort from religion; to dwell upon its hopes; to pursue its duties; to acquire a love, a taste, and relish for its exercises and meditations.

One very general cause of entanglement in habits of sin, is the connection which they have with our way of life, with our business, with the objects that are continually thrown in our way, with the practices and usages which prevail in the company we keep. Every condition of life has its particular temptation. And not only so, but when we have fallen into evil habits, these habits so mix themselves with our method of life, return so upon us at their usual times, and places, and occurrence of objects, that it becomes very difficult to break the habit without a general change of our whole system. Now I say, whenever this is a man's case, that he cannot shake off his sins without giving up his way of life, he must give up that also, let it cost what it will. For it is, in truth, no other sacrifice than what our Saviour himself in the strongest terms enjoins,

when he bids his disciples to pluck out a right eye, or cut off a right hand (that is, surrender whatever is most dear or valuable to them), that they be not cast with all their members into hell fire. If a trade or business cannot be followed without giving into practices which conscience does not approve, we must relinquish the trade, or business itself. If it cannot be followed without bringing us into the way of temptation to intemperance, more than we can withstand, or in fact, do withstand, we must also relinquish it, and turn ourselves to some safer course. If the company we keep, the conversation we hear, the objects that surround us, tend to draw us, and do in fact draw us, into debauchery and licentiousness, we must fly from the place, the company, and the objects, no matter with what reluctance we do so, or what loss and inconvenience we suffer by doing it. This may appear to be a hard lesson; it is, nevertheless, what right reason dictates, and what, as hath already been observed, our Saviour himself enjoins, in terms made as strong and forcible as he could make them.

Sometimes men are led by prudential mo-

tives, or by motives of mere inclination, to change their employment, their habitation, or their station of life. These occasions afford excellent and invaluable opportunities for correcting and breaking off any vicious habits which we may have contracted. It is when many associations, which give strength to a sinful habit, are interrupted and dissolved by the change which has taken place, that we can best resolve to conquer the sin, and set out upon a new course and a new life. The man who does not take advantage of such opportunities when they arise, has not the salvation of his soul at heart: nevertheless, they are not to be waited for.

But to those sudden changes which we recommend, will it be objected that they are seldom lasting? Is this the fact? Are they more liable to fail, than attempts to change gradually? I think not. And there is always this difference between them. A sudden change is sincere at the time: a gradual change never is such truly and properly: and this is a momentous distinction. In every view, and in every allowance, and in every plea of human frailty, we must dis-

tinguish between what is consistent with sincerity, and what is not. And in these two methods of setting about a reformation, by reason of their different character in this respect, the first may, though with fear and humility, expect the help of God's aiding Spirit, the other hardly can. For whilst not by surprise and unpremeditatedly we fall into casual sins, but whilst by plan and upon system we allow ourselves in licences, which, though not so many or so great as before, are still, whenever they are indulged, so many known sins; whilst, in a word, though we imagine ourselves to be in a progress of amendment, we yet deliberately continue to sin, our endeavours are so corrupted, I will not say by imperfection, but by insincerity, that we can hardly hope to call down upon them the blessing of Almighty God.

Reformation is never impossible; nor, in a strict sense, can it be said to be doubtful. Nothing is, properly speaking, doubtful, which it is in a man's power to accomplish; nothing is doubtful to us, but what is placed out of the reach of our will, or depends upon causes which we cannot influence: and this

is not the case with reformation from sin. On the other hand, if we look to experience, we are compelled, though with grief of heart, to confess, that the danger is very great of a man, who is engaged in a course of sin, never reforming from his sin at all. Oh, let this danger be known! Let it stand, like a flaming sword, to turn us aside from the road to vice. Let it offer itself in its full magnitude. Let it strike, as it ought, the souls of those who are upon the brink, perhaps, of their whole future fate; who are tempted; and who are deliberating about entering upon some course of sin.

Let also the perception and convincement of this danger sink deep into the hearts of all who are in such a situation, as that they must either reform or perish. They have it in their power, and it must be now their only hope, by strong and firm exertion, to make themselves an exception to the general lot of habitual sinners. It must be an exception. If they leave things to their course, they will share the fate in which they see others, involved in guilt like themselves, end their lives. It is only by a most strenu-

ous effort they can rescue themselves from it. We apprise them, that their best hope is in a sudden and complete change, sincerely begun, faithfully persisted in; broken, it is possible, by human frailty, but never changed into a different plan, never declining into a compromised, partial, gradual reform; on the contrary, resumed with the same sincerity as that with which it set out, and with a force of resolution, and an earnestness of prayer, increased in proportion to the clearer view they have acquired of their danger and of their want.

SERMON XXXIII.

THIS LIFE A STATE OF PROBATION.

PSALM cxix. 71.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.

OF the various views under which human life has been considered, no one seems so reasonable as that which regards it as a state of probation; meaning, by a state of probation, a state calculated for trying us, and calculated for improving us. A state of complete enjoyment and happiness it certainly is not. The hopes, the spirits, and the inexperience of young men and women are apt, and very willing to see it in this light. To them life is full of entertainment: their relish is high, their expectations unbounded. For a very few years it is possible, and I think barely

possible, that they may go on without check or interruption; but they will be cured of this delusion. Pain and sorrow, disease and infirmity, accident and disappointment, losses and distress, will soon meet them in their acquaintance, their families, or their persons. The hard-hearted for their own, the tender for other's woe, will always find and feel, enough at least to convince them; that this world was not made for a scene of perpetual gaiety or uninterrupted enjoyment.

Still less can we believe that it was made for a place of misery: so much otherwise, that misery is in no instance the end or object of contrivance. We are surrounded by contrivance and design. A human body is a cluster of contrivances. So is the body of every animal; so is the structure of every plant; so is even the vilest weed that grows upon the road side. Contrivances therefore, infinite in number, infinite also in variety, are all directed to beneficial purposes, and, in a vast plurality of instances, execute their purpose. In our own bodies only reflect how many thousand things must

go right for us to be an hour at ease. Yet at all times multitudes are so; and are so without being sensible how great a thing it is. Too much, or too little of sensibility, or of action, in any one of the almost numberless organs, or of any part of the numberless organs, by which life is sustained, may be productive of extreme anguish, or of lasting infirmity. A particle smaller than an atom in a sunbeam, may, in a wrong place, be the occasion of the loss of limbs, of senses, or of life. Yet, under all this continual jeopardy, this momentary liability to danger and disorder, we are preserved. It is not possible, therefore, that this state could be designed as a state of misery, because the great tendency of the designs which we see in the universe, is to counteract, to prevent, to guard against it. We know enough of nature to be assured, that misery universal, irremediable, inexhaustible misery, was in the Creator's power, if he had willed it. Forasmuch therefore as the result is so much otherwise, we are certain that no such purpose dwelt in the divine mind.

But since, amidst much happiness, and amidst contrivances *for* happiness, so far as we can judge (and of many we can judge), misery, and very considerable portions of it, do exist, it becomes a natural inquiry, to what end this mixture of good and evil is properly adapted. And I think the Scriptures place before us, not only the true (for, if we believe the Scriptures, we must believe it to be *that*), but the most rational and satisfactory answer which can be given to the inquiry; namely, that it is intended for a state of trial and probation. For it appears to be capable of proof, both that no state but one, which contained in it an admixture of good and evil, would be suited to this purpose; and also that our present state, as well in its general plan as in its particular properties, serves this purpose with peculiar propriety.

A state totally incapable of misery could not be a state of probation. It would not be a state in which virtue or vice could even be exercised at all; I mean that large class of virtues and vices, which

we comprehend under the name of social qualities. The existence of these depends upon the existence of misery, as well as of happiness in the world, and of different degrees of both: because their very nature and difference consists in promoting or preventing, in augmenting or diminishing, in causing, aggravating, or relieving the wants, sufferings, and distresses of our fellow-creatures. Compassion, charity, humanity, benevolence, nor even justice, could have any place in the world, if there were not human conditions to excite them; objects and sufferings upon which they might operate; misery, as well as happiness, which might be affected by them.

Nor would, in my opinion, the purposes of trial be sufficiently provided for, by a state in which happiness and misery regularly followed virtue and vice: I mean, in which there was no happiness, but what was merited by virtue, no misery but what was brought on by vice. Such a state would be a state of retribution, not a state of probation. It may be our state hereafter; it may be a better state, but it is

not a state of probation; it is not the state through which it is fitting we should pass before we enter into the other. For when we speak of a state of probation, we speak of a state in which the character may both be put to the proof, and also its good qualities be confirmed and strengthened, if not formed and produced, by having occasions presented in which they may be called forth and required. Now, beside that the social qualities which have been mentioned would be very limited in their exercise, if there was no evil in the world but what was plainly a punishment (for though we might pity, and even that would be greatly checked, we could not actually succour or relieve, without disturbing the execution, or arresting, as it were, the hand of justice); beside this difficulty, there is another class of most important duties which would be in a great measure excluded. They are the severest, the sublimest, perhaps the most meritorious, of which we are capable; I mean patience and composure under distress, pain, and affliction; a stedfast keeping up of our confidence in God, and our de-

pendence upon his final goodness, even at the time that every thing present is discouraging and adverse; and what is no less difficult to retain, a cordial desire for the happiness and comfort of others, even then, when we are deprived of our own. I say, that the possession of this temper is almost the perfection of our nature. But it is then only possessed, when it is put to the trial: tried at all it could not have been in a life made up only of pleasure and gratification. Few things are easier than to perceive, to feel, to acknowledge, to extol the goodness of God, the bounty of Providence, the beauties of nature, when all things go well; when our health, our spirits, our circumstances, conspire to fill our hearts with gladness, and our tongues with praise. This is easy: this is delightful. None but they who are sunk in sensuality, sottishness, and stupefaction, or whose understandings are dissipated by frivolous pursuits; none but the most giddy and insensible can be destitute of these sentiments. But this is not the trial, or the proof. It is in the chambers of sickness; under the stroke of affliction;

amidst the pinchings of want, the groans of pain, the pressures of infirmity: in grief, in misfortune; through gloom and horror, that it will be seen whether we hold fast our hope, our confidence, our trust in God; whether this hope and confidence be able to produce in us resignation, acquiescence and submission. And as those dispositions, which perhaps from the comparative perfection of our moral nature, could not have been exercised in a world of unmixed gratification, so neither would they have found their proper office or object in a state of strict and evident retribution; that is, in which we had no sufferings to submit to, but what were evidently and manifestly the punishment of our sins. A mere submission to punishment, evidently and plainly such, would not have constituted, at least would very imperfectly have constituted, the disposition which we speak of, the true resignation of a Christian.

It seems, therefore, to be argued with great probability, from the general economy of things around us, that our present

state was meant for a state of probation: because positively it contains that admixture of good and evil which ought to be found in such a state to make it answer its purpose, the production, exercise, and improvement of virtue: and because negatively it could not be intended either for a state of absolute happiness, or a state of absolute misery, neither of which it is.

We may now also observe in what manner many of the evils of life are adjusted to this particular end, and how also they are contrived to soften and alleviate themselves and one another. It will be enough at present, if I can point out how far this is the case in the two instances, which, of all others, the most nearly and seriously affect us, death and disease. The events of life and death are so disposed, as to beget, in all reflecting minds, a constant watchfulness. "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch:" Hold yourselves in a constant state of preparation: "Be ready, for ye know not when your Lord cometh." Had there been assigned to our lives a certain age or period, to which all, or al-

most all, were sure of arriving; in the younger part, that is to say, in nine-tenths of the whole of mankind, there would have been such an absolute security as would have produced, it is much to be feared, the utmost neglect of duty, of religion, of God, of themselves; whilst the remaining part would have been too much overcome with the certainty of their fate, would have too much resembled the condition of those who have before their eyes a fixed and appointed day of execution. The same consequence would have ensued if death had followed any known rule whatever. It would have produced security in one part of the species, and despair in another. The first would have been in the highest degree dangerous to the character; the second insupportable to the spirits. The same observation we are entitled to repeat concerning the two cases of sudden death, and of death brought on by long disease. If sudden deaths never occurred, those who found themselves free from disease would be in perfect safety: they would regard themselves as out of the reach of danger. With all apprehen-

sions, they would lose all seriousness and all restraint: and those persons who the most wanted to be checked, and to be awakened to a sense of the consequences of virtue and vice, the strong, the healthy, and the active, would be without the greatest of all checks, that which arises from the constant liability of being called to judgment. If there were no sudden deaths, the most awful warning which mortals can receive, would be lost; that consideration which carries the mind the most forcibly to religion, which convinces us that it is indeed our proper concern, namely, the precariousness of our present condition, would be done away. On the other hand, if sudden deaths were too frequent, human life might become too perilous: there would not be stability and dependence either upon our own lives, or the lives of those with whom we were connected, sufficient to carry on the regular offices of human society. In this respect, therefore, we see much wisdom. Supposing death to be appointed as the mode (and some mode there must be) of passing from one state of existence to another, the

manner in which it is made to happen, conduces to the purposes of warning and admonition, without overthrowing the conduct of human affairs.

Of sickness the moral and religious use will be acknowledged, and, in fact, is acknowledged, by all who have experienced it: and they who have not experienced it, own it to be a fit state for the meditations, the offices, of religion. The fault, I fear, is, that we refer ourselves too much to that state. We think of these things too little in health, because we shall necessarily have to think of them when we come to die. This is a great fault: but then it confesses, what is undoubtedly true, that the sick bed and the death bed shall inevitably force these reflections upon us. In that it is right, though it be wrong in waiting till the season of actual virtue and actual reformation be past, and when, consequently, the sick bed and the death bed can bring nothing but uncertainty, horror, and despair. But my present subject leads me to consider sickness, not so much as a preparation for death, as the trial of our

virtue; of virtues the most severe, the most arduous, perhaps the best pleasing to Almighty God; namely, trust and confidence in him, under circumstances of discouragement and perplexity. To lift up the feeble hands, and the languid eye: to draw and turn with holy hope to our Creator, when every comfort forsakes us, and every help fails; to feel and find in him, in his mercies, his promises, in the works of his providence, and still more in his word, and in the revelation of his designs by Jesus Christ, such rest and consolation to the soul, as to stifle our complaints, and pacify our murmurs; to beget in our hearts tranquillity and confidence, in the place of terror and consternation, and this, with simplicity and sincerity, without having, or wishing to have, one human witness to observe or know it, is such a test and trial of faith and hope, of patience and devotion, as cannot fail of being in a very high degree well-pleasing to the Author of our nature, the guardian, the inspector, and the rewarder of our virtues. It is true in this instance, as it is true in all, that whatever tries our virtue,

strengthens and improves it. Virtue comes out of the fire purer and brighter than it went into it. Many virtues are not only proved, but produced, by trials: they have properly no existence without them. "We glory," saith St. Paul, "in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope."

But of sickness we may likewise remark, how wonderfully it reconciles us to the thoughts, the expectation, and the approach of death; and how this becomes, in the hand of Providence, an example of one evil being made to correct another. Without question, the difference is wide between the sensations of a person who is condemned to die by violence, and of one who is brought gradually to his end by the progress of disease; and this difference sickness produces. To the Christian, whose mind is not harrowed up by the memory of unrepented guilt, the calm and gentle approach of his dissolution has nothing in it terrible. In that sacred custody, in which they that sleep in Christ will be preserved, he sees a rest from pain

and weariness, from trouble and distress. Gradually withdrawn from the cares and interests of the world: more and more weaned from the pleasures of the body, and feeling the weight and pressure of its infirmities, he may be brought almost to desire, with St. Paul, to be no longer absent from Christ; knowing, as he did, and as he assures us, that, "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

SERMON XXXIV.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF ONE ANOTHER IN A FUTURE STATE.

COL. i. 28.

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

THESE words have a primary and a secondary use. In their first and most obvious view, they express the extreme earnestness, and anxiety with which the apostle Paul sought the salvation of his converts. To bring men to Jesus Christ, and, when brought, to turn and save them from their sins, and to keep them stedfast unto the end in the faith and obedience to which

they were called, was the whole work of the great apostle's ministry, the desire of his heart, and the labour of his life. It was that in which he spent all his time and all his thought; for the sake of which he travelled from country to country, warning every man, as he speaks in the text, and exhorting every man, enduring every hardship and every injury, ready at all times to sacrifice his life, and at last actually sacrificing it, in order to accomplish the great purpose of his mission, that he might at the last day present his beloved converts perfect in Christ Jesus. This is the direct scope of the text. But it is not for this that I have made choice of it. The last clause of the verse contains within it, indirectly and by implication, a doctrine, certainly of great personal importance, and, I trust also of great comfort to every man who hears me. The clause is this, "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:" by which I understand St. Paul to express his hope and prayer, that at the general judgment of the world, he might present to Christ the fruits of his ministry, the converts whom he had made

to his faith and religion, and might present them perfect in every good work. And if this be rightly interpreted, then it affords a manifest and necessary inference, that the saints in a future life will meet and be known again to one another: for how, without knowing again his converts in their new and glorified state, could St. Paul desire or expect to present them at the last day.

My brethren, this is a doctrine of real consequence. That we shall come again to a new life; that we shall, by some method or other, be made happy, or be made miserable, in that new state, according to the deeds done in the body, according as we have acted and governed ourselves in this world, is a point affirmed absolutely and positively, in all shapes, and under every variety of expression, in almost every page of the New Testament. It is the grand point inculcated from the beginning to the end of that book. But concerning the particular nature of the change we are to undergo, and in what is to consist the employment and happiness of those blessed

spirits which are received into heaven, our information, even under the Gospel, is very limited. We own it is so. Even St. Paul, who had extraordinary communications, confessed "that in these things we see through a glass darkly." But at the same time that we acknowledge that we know little, we ought to remember, that, without Christ, we should have known nothing. It might not be possible in our present state, to convey to us, by words, more clear or explicit conceptions of what will hereafter become of us; if possible it might not be fitting. In that celebrated chapter, the 15th of 1 Corinthians, St. Paul makes an inquisitive person ask, "How are the dead raised, and with what body do they come?" From his answer to this question we are able, I think, to collect thus much clearly and certainly: that at the resurrection we shall have bodies of some sort or other; that they will be totally different from, and greatly excelling, our present bodies, though possibly in some manner or other proceeding from them, as a plant from its seed; that as there exists in nature a great variety of animal substances; one

flesh of man, another of beasts, another of birds, another of fishes; as there exist also great differences in the nature, dignity, and splendour of inanimate substances, "one glory of the sun, another of the moon, another of the stars:" so there subsists likewise in the magazines of God Almighty's creation, two very distinct kinds of bodies, (still both bodies,) a natural body and a spiritual body; that the natural body is what human beings bear about with them now; the Spiritual body, far surpassing the other, what the blessed will be clothed with hereafter. "Flesh and blood," our apostle teaches, "cannot inherit the kingdom of God," that is, is by no means suited to that state, is not capable of it. Yet living men are flesh and blood; the dead in the graves are the remains of the same; wherefore to make all who are Christ's, capable of entering into his eternal kingdom, and at all fitted for it, a great change shall be suddenly wrought. As well all the just, who shall be alive at the coming of Christ (whenever that event takes place), as those who shall be raised from the dead, shall in the twinkling of an eye be

changed. Bodies they shall retain still, but so altered in form and fashion, in nature and substance, that "this corruptible shall put on incorruption:" what is now necessarily mortal and necessarily perishable, shall acquire a fixed and permanent existence. And this is agreeable to, or rather the same thing as what our apostle delivers in another epistle, where he teaches us, that "Christ shall change our vile body that it may be like his glorious body;" a change so great, so stupendous, that he justly styles it an act of omnipotence, "according," says he, "to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." Since, then, a great alteration will take place in the frame and constitution of the bodies with which we shall be raised, from those which we carry with us to the grave, it requires some authority or passage of Scripture to prove that, after this change, and in this new state, we shall be known again to one another: that those who know each other on earth, will know each other in heaven. I do allow, that the general strain of Scripture seems to suppose it, that when St.

Paul speaks "of the spirits of just men made perfect," and of their "coming to the general assembly of saints," it seems to import that we should be known of them, and of one another; that when Christ declares, "that the secrets of the heart shall be disclosed," it imports, that they shall be disclosed to those who were before the witnesses of our actions. I do also think, that it is agreeable to the dictates of reason itself to believe, that the same great God who brings men to life again, will bring those together whom death has separated. When his power is at work in this great dispensation, it is very probable that this should be a part of his gracious design. But for a specific text, I know none which speaks the thing more positively than this which I have chosen. St. Paul, you see, expected that he should know, and be known to, those his converts; that their relation should subsist and be retained between them; and with this hope he laboured and endeavoured, instantly and incessantly, that he might be able at last to present them, and to present them perfect in Christ Jesus. Now

what St. Paul appeared to look for as to the general continuance, or rather revival of our knowledge of each other after death, every man who strives, like St. Paul, to attain to the resurrection of the dead, may expect, as well as he.

Having discoursed thus far concerning the article of doctrine itself: I will now proceed to enforce such practical reflections as result from it. Now it is necessary for you to observe, that all which is here produced from Scripture concerning the resurrection of the dead, relates solely to the resurrection of the just. It is of them only that St. Paul speaks in the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians. It is of the body of him, who is accepted in Christ, that the apostle declares, that "it is sown in dishonour, but raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power." Likewise, when he speaks, in another place, of "Christ's changing our vile bodies that they may be like his glorious body;" it is of the bodies of Christ's saints alone, of whom this is said. This point is, I think, agreed upon amongst learned men, and is indeed

very plain. In like manner, in the passage of the text, and, I think, it will be found true of every other in which mankind knowing one another in a future life is implied, the implication extends only to these who are received amongst the blessed. Whom was St. Paul to know? even those whom he was to present perfect in Christ Jesus. Concerning the reprobate and rejected, whether they will not be banished from the presence of God, and from all their former relations; whether they will not be lost, as to all happiness of their own, so to the knowledge of those, who knew them in this mortal state, we have from Scripture no assurance or intimation whatever. One thing seems to follow with probability from the nature of the thing, namely, that if the wicked be known to one another in a state of perdition, their knowledge will only serve to aggravate their misery.

What then is the inference from all this? Do we seek, do we covet earnestly to be restored to the society of those who were once near and dear to us, and who are

gone before? It is only by leading godly lives, that we can hope to have this wish accomplished. Should we prefer, to all delights, to all pleasures in the world, the satisfaction of meeting again in happiness and peace, those whose presence, whilst they were amongst us, made up the comfort and enjoyment of our lives? It must be, by giving up our sins, by parting with our criminal delights and guilty pursuits, that we can ever expect to attain to this satisfaction. Is there a great difference between the thought of losing those we love for ever, of taking at their deaths or our own, an eternal farewell, never to see them more; and the reflection that we are about to be separated for a few years at the longest, to be united with them in a new and better state of mutual existence; is there, I say, a difference to the heart of man between these two things? and does it not call upon us to strive with redoubled endeavours, that the case truly may turn out so? The more and more we reflect upon the difference, between the consequences of a lewd, unthinking, careless,

profane, dishonest life; and a life of religion, sobriety, seriousness, good actions and good principles, the more we shall see the madness and stupidity of the one, and the true solid wisdom of the other. This is one of the distinctions. If we go on in our sins, we are not to expect to awaken to a joyful meeting with our friends, and relatives, and dear connexions. If we turn away from our sins, and take up religion in earnest, we may. My brethren, religion disarms even death. It disarms it of that which is its bitterness and its sting, the power of dividing those who are dear to one another. But this blessing, like every blessing which it promises, is only to the just and good, to the penitent and reformed, to those who are touched at the heart with a sense of its importance; who know thoroughly and experimentally, who feel in their inward mind and consciences, that religion is the only course that can end well: that can bring either them or theirs to the presence of God, blessed for evermore; that can cause them, after the toils of life and struggle of death are over, to

meet again in a joyful deliverance from the grave; in a new and never ceasing happiness, in the presence and society of one another.

SERMON XXXV.

THE GENERAL RESURRECTION.

JOHN, v. 28, 29.

The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

THESE words are so important, that if Jesus Christ had never delivered any other, if he had come into the world and pronounced only this simple declaration, and proved the *truth* and *certainty* of it by the miracles which he wrought, he would have left enough to have guided his followers to

everlasting happiness: he would have done more towards making mankind virtuous and happy, than all the teachers and all the wisdom that ever appeared upon earth, had done before him. We should each and every one of us have owed more to him for this single piece of intelligence, than we owe to our parents, our dearest friend, or the best benefactor we have. This text is the poor man's creed. It is his religion: it is to be imprinted upon his memory, and upon his heart: it is what the most simple can understand: it is what, when understood and believed, excels all the knowledge and learning in the universe: it is what we are to carry about with us in our thoughts: daily remember and daily reflect upon: remember not only at church, not only in our devotions, or in our set meditations, but in our business, our pleasures, in whatever we intend, plan, or execute, whatever we think about, or whatever we set about; remember, that "they that have done good shall come unto the resurection of life; they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

Reflect what great things this short sentence contains. It teaches us, beyond contradiction, that all does not end here: that our happiness or misery is not over at our death: that a new state of things will begin with every one of us, and that in a short time. This point I say, our Saviour proves beyond contradiction: and how does he prove it? By healing the sick, by restoring sight to the blind, by raising the dead, by various astonishing and incontestable miracles; and above all, by coming himself to life again, after being three days dead and buried, he *proved* that God Almighty was with him; that he came from God: that he knew what passed in the other world; that he had God's own authority to say and promise this to mankind. Upon the faith and trust of this promise, we know that we shall rise again; all are equally assured of it, from the highest to the lowest. Wise and learned men thought indeed the same thing before; they concluded it to be so from probable argument and reasonings; but this was not like having it, as we have it, from God himself;

or, what is just the same thing, from the mouth of a person, to whom God gave witness by signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. They were far short of our certainty, who did study it the deepest. There were but few who could study or comprehend it at all. Blessed be God, we are all informed, we are all, from the most learned to the most ignorant, made sure and certain of it.

Having then this great doctrine secured, that we shall all come again into a new world and a new life, the next great point, which every serious mind will turn to, the second grand question to be asked, is, who are to be happy, and who will be miserable in that other state? The text satisfies us completely upon this head. You ask, who shall come to the resurrection of life? The text replies, they that have done good. Observe well, and never forget this answer. It is not the wise, the learned, the great, the honoured, the professor of this or that doctrine, the member of this church, or the maintainer of that article of faith, but

he that doeth good; *he*, of whatever quality or condition, who strives honestly to make his life of service to those about him; to be useful in his calling, and to his generation; to his family, to his neighbourhood, and, according to his ability, to his country and to mankind; "he that doeth good." All the rest, without this, goes for nothing, though he understand the things of religion ever so well, or believe ever so rightly: though he cry, Lord, Lord: be he ever so constant and devout in his prayers; or talk ever so much, or so well, or so earnestly for religion: unless he do good; unless his actions, and dealings, and behaviour come up to his knowledge, and his discourse correspond with his outward profession and belief, it will avail him nothing; he is not the man, to whom Jesus Christ hath promised in the text, that he shall come to the resurrection of life. The issue of life and death is put upon our conduct and behaviour; that is made the *test* we are to be tried by.

Again, When we read in Scripture, when we know from positive and undoubted authority, that misery and destruction, ruin, torment, and damnation, are reserved for some, it is surely the most natural, the most interesting of all inquiries to know for whom. The text tells us, "for them that have done evil."

Here let the timorous conscience take courage. It is not any man's errors, or ignorance; his want of understanding, or education, or ability, that will be laid to his charge at the day of Judgment; or that will bring him into danger of the damnation, which the gospel threatens; it is *having done evil*; having wilfully gone about to disobey what he knew to be the will and command of his Creator, by committing mischief, and doing wrong and injury to his fellow-creatures.

Let the bold and presumptuous sinner hear this text with fear and trembling. Let him, who cares not what misery he occasions, what evil and harm he does, if he

can but compass his purpose, carry his own end, or serve his wicked lusts and pleasures; let him, I say, be given to understand, what he has to look for; "he that doeth evil shall come to the Resurrection of damnation;" this is absolute, final, and peremptory; here is no exception, no excuse, no respect of person, or condition.

They that have done good shall come again unto the Resurrection of life. But, alas! I hear you say, What good can I do? my means and my opportunities are too small and straitened to think of doing good. You do not sufficiently reflect, what doing good is. You are apt to confine the notion of it to giving to others, and giving liberally. This, no doubt, is right and meritorious: but it is certainly not in every man's power; comparatively speaking, it is, indeed, in the power of very few. But doing good is of a much more general nature; and is in a greater or less degree practicable by all. For whenever we make one human creature hap-

pier, or better than he would have been without our help, then we do good. And when we do this from a proper motive, that is, with a sense and a desire of pleasing God by doing it, then we do good in the true sense of the text, and of God's gracious promise. Now let every one, in particular, reflect, whether, in this sense, he has not some good in his power: some within his own doors, to his family, his children, his kindred; by his labour, his authority, his example, by bringing them up, and keeping them in the way of passing their lives honestly, and quietly, and usefully. What good more important, more practicable than this is? Again, something may be done beyond our own household: by acts of tenderness and kindness, of help, and compassion to our neighbours. Not a particle of this will be lost. It is all set down in the book of life; and happy are they, who have much there! And again, if any of us be really sorry, that we have not so much in our power, as we would desire, let us remember this short rule, that since we can do

little good, to take care that we do no harm. Let us show our sincerity by our innocence: that, at least, is always in our power.

Finally, let us reflect, that in the habitations of life are many mansions; rewards of various orders and degrees, proportioned to our various degrees of virtue and exertion here. "He that soweth plenteously, shall reap plenteously." We can never do too much; never be too earnest in doing good; because every good action here will, we are certain, be an addition of happiness hereafter; will advance us to a better condition in the life to come, whatever be our lot or success in this. God will not fail of his promise. He hath commissioned his beloved Son to tell us, that they that have done good shall enter into the resurrection of life. Let us humbly and thankfully accept his gracious offer. We have but one business in this world. It is to strive to make us worthy of a better. Whatever this trial may cost us: how long, how earnestly, how patiently soever, through

whatever difficulties, by whatever toils we endeavour to obey and please our Maker, we are supported in them by this solid and never ceasing consolation, "that our labour is not in vain in the Lord."

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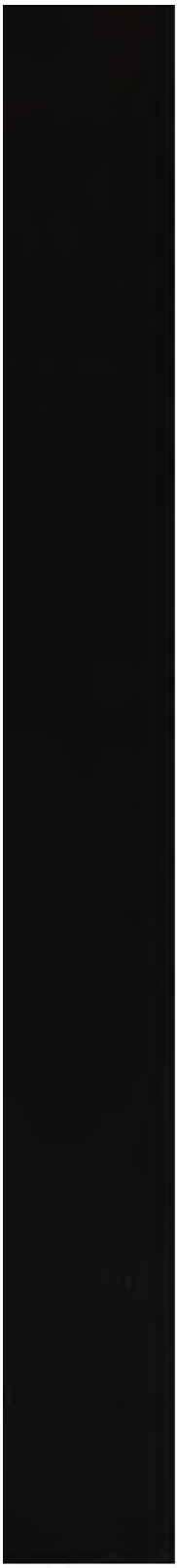
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